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SHEPHERD'S WARNING

NOVELS BY ERIC LEADBITTER

Rain Before Seven
The Road to Nowhere
Shepherd's Warning

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Shepherd's Warning

/ BY

ERIC LEADBITTER

Author of "Rain Before Seven," and "The Road to Nowhere"

"A red sky in the morning Is the shepherd's warning"



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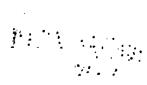
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To T. R. COXON



Shepherd's Warning

FIRST PART (1892)

I

WHEN it was almost dark, and a ravelled strip of yellow light alone lingered in the western sky, a man reached the brow of the hills above Fidding, and paused for a moment to settle more comfortably a bundle of wood on his shoulder before beginning the steep descent into the village. It was an April evening, but the dying winter, in a last rally, had gripped the earth with a bitter frost, so that the muddy footpath under the trees that crowned the hills had turned to the hardness of stone, and beside the path the dead leaves, among which some creature rustled in frightened retreat, were stiff and unvielding. There at the edge of the wood, where the path dipped downwards, it was very still, and the air clear and keen. Behind, through the bare limbs of the trees, a diffused glow in the sky showed where lay Pricehurst, of which a few scattered lights glinted through the mist that shrouded the low-lying ground on which the town stood. It was preternaturally still, and the silence seemed merely emphasized by the occasional rustling among the dead leaves, where unseen eyes were watchful, and by the notes of a small church bell which ascended from the village, each chime seeming to rise smoothly and burst into crisp sound as it reached the crest of the hills, as bubbles rise and burst on the surface of silent pools.

There was no snow upon the ground, but the persistent frost that had hardened the path through the woods had made the steep track down to the village treacherous and glassy, so that when the man began to descend it, after adjusting his burden he did so cautiously, trying each foothold before throwing his whole weight upon it. Having reached the foot of this descent, he climbed over a stile on to the roadway, along which he set out more briskly. But his gait was still clumsy and shambling, each step falling heavily and uncertainly, and striking from the frozen metal of the road the staccato ring of nailed boots, while at each pace his head and shoulders jerked forward and his knees gave. In spite of this awkwardness, he covered the ground sufficiently quickly to gain upon some other wayfarers whose voices could be heard droning desultorily in front. Before long he was near enough to become the object of a hail.

[&]quot;That you, Bob?"

[&]quot; Ah."

[&]quot;Warm, en't it!"

"Makes you in a proper sweat, it do."

This, the correct formula for such an occasion, was greeted with appreciative chuckles, and the group, consisting altogether of four men, moved on towards Fidding, which was close at hand.

These men, who, owing to the frost, had been transferred from their ordinary farm work to various makeshift jobs, were all on their way home. All were tired, and their faces, had they been visible, were unemotional and rather sour, but the vivacity that is inherent and almost indomitable in their kind had not deserted It endured even at the end of a day's labor that had lasted from daybreak to nightfall, and the stimulus of company made it manifest, even if without such a stimulus it might have remained dormant. It did not take the form of objectless flippancy, but of lighthearted treatment of a subject with which they were intimately and seriously concerned—the frost, on the duration of which hung the fortune of the coming year, and more immediately the prospect of further curtailment of work at the farms.

"We don't want no more of this frost," said the shortest of the four men, who was called Tewson.

"Ah," agreed Rideout, his neighbor. "'Tis cruel how they apple-trees of Mason's is nipped, just as they was coming on so nice. And it en't only the *fruit*."

"What is wanted is some *nice* rain. Not a cupful, but a good wetting. 'Tis froze near a foot down, I reckon."

"Ah, a foot if not better. 'Twill be a rare time before the soil is kind again."

By this time the outskirts of the village had been reached, and here and there could be seen small windows faintly illuminated by the yellow light of candles or oil-lamps.

"Anyone heard how old Charley Clarke is doing?" asked Tewson.

"Mrs. Clarke told me 'smorning as he was only very middling," answered the man with the bundle of wood on his shoulders. "He don't sim able to throw off this here sickness nohow."

"Well, I'm sorry for him," said Rideout. "'Tis irksome for him to be laid up on his back as he is, poor chap. 'Tis near a week since he was at his work."

"So 'tis. Well, good-night, all," said the other, leaving the group and turning up a side path, his footfalls echoing away.

"I always was sorry for old Bob Garrett," said Rideout, as he walked on with his two remaining companions.

"He is the one as lives along of his three widdied children, en't he?" asked Vines, the youngest of the party, who was only about twenty years old, and was one of those rarities, a newcomer to the village.

"They en't exactly his children, as you might say," Rideout explained. "They call him dad, and don't mind anyone else of the name. He is their granddad to speak accurate. They was his boy Sam's youngsters, and Fred, the youngest of them, killed his mother when he come. A fine hearty gal she was. But you never know how 'twill be. 'Tweren't above three years after that afore their dad, young Sam, met with a mishap along of a thrashing machine he was working with. Got his arm took in it somehow. Old Henry Snowball, as was there at the time, said hes arm was that messed up, and the hull place bloody, as it made him come over queer seeing it. Made him heave. The end of it was he got his arm corrupted: they had his arm and a leg off before they was done. Oh dear! 'twas a business-poor chap. But he was took in the end, just the same. His missus, Lucy Vallance, there weren't no one on her side, so old Bob had to take the kiddies. They led him a dance at first, I can tell you he being alone and his old gal dead. They're coming on now, but 'twill be a tidy few days before they are off his hands, and he en't no younger nor what he was. He's had hes share, he have. I'm sure I hardly know what he would have done if 'tweren't for Mrs. Clarke. She's bin in and out most days, them being neighbors. Not but what he pays her. I don't know what she do. now as her old man is so sadly. I'm sure. Bob finds it as much as he can do to get himself a bit of 'bacca with they youngsters in hes house, like so many cuckoos. You won't see him down at 'The Gate' not above twice or thrice in a twelvemonth: not but what he eniovs his glass same as envbody else do."

The narrative was finished in the middle of the street outside Rideout's cottage, and when it was ended the three men, after a look round at the sky, decided that it "smelt cold," and parted with cheery valedictions.

II

As Bob Garrett walked up the short path towards his cottage, after leaving his companions, he could hear all round him in the darkness the familiar sounds of the village in the evening—a few slouching footfalls; the cadence of an occasional voice trained to express the speaker's meaning by innumerable modulations that helped out a scanty vocabulary; the clatter of a pail being set down beside a pump; and, near at hand, a colloquy between two voices, one of which was merely a subdued hum, while the other was shrill and overbearing. "Old Hammer and Tongs at it again," he thought, and, almost at the same moment, saw coming down the path towards him a small figure.

"Why, Sally!" he exclaimed, "you're a reg'lar little rabbit, you are, coming along so quiet. Where have you bin to, so late as 'tis?"

"Please, mother told me to goo to Mrs. Honeyman's and ask for some oil, and there is a ha'penny change, she said, Mr. Garrett."

Bob Garrett looked kindly at the little girl who so faithfully repeated her message, his eyes traveling

from her small pale face, about which hung luxuriant black hair, to her knees, which showed, in the deepening dusk, palely through great holes in her stockings.

"Well, my dear, you run along home. You ought to be in your bed," he said aloud, adding to himself: "Not that 'tis an over-grand home the poor little wench has to go to."

A moment later, he pressed the latch of his cottage door, and, in a sudden flood of warm light, entered the kitchen, where his granddaughter Liddy, a girl of about thirteen, sat by a small fire awaiting him.

"Well, Liddy, I have got a nice faggot of firing for you," he said, throwing upon the floor the bundle of wood he had been carrying, and eyeing with satisfaction Liddy's clothes, which, although almost threadbare, were neat and clean, and very different from those of the little girl he had just met. "Been a good gal?" he asked, smiling, as he shrugged his shoulders to ease them after their burden.

"Of course I have, dad," Liddy answered seriously.

"But Fred, oh! he has bin naughty!"

"Bin naughty, has he? What's he bin up to?"

"Why, he hasn't hardly bin home since he come back from school. He's out skylarking with the boys, and so's Tom."

"I'll give him skylarking!" grunted her grandfather good-humoredly. "You get my tea, Lid, while I am having a clean-up. I can't wait for no Freds."

14 SHEPHERD'S WARNING

A few moments later, he returned, growling, from the little scullery. "Drat these here bushes.' My hands is that *sore*. When the water gets to them it's enough to make you sing out!"

As he dried in front of the fire, it could be seen that his hands were in a terrible state. Numbed and made clumsy by the cold, they had been scratched and torn by the hedges he had been clearing, until their whole surface looked raw. Cold water and soap had done little towards cleansing them, and every line in the flesh, every pore, was sharply outlined by the dirt that had become embedded in the skin. But such things were so familiar as to be accepted as a matter of course, and hunger would not wait upon cleanliness. While he was washing, Liddy had set the supper on the table—a pot of tea, a large loaf and a slab of butter, with a thick rasher of bacon for her grandfather, who, as the breadwinner, needed all the good food that could be afforded.

Hardly had Liddy and her grandfather sat down, when the two boys noisily entered. Tom, a hobblede-hoy with stiff, straight hair, was about a year older than his sister, while Fred, the baby of the family, was a thin boy of ten, whose large eyes and clean features gave him a look of refinement that was lacking in the other two children.

"Now then, what have you bin up to?" asked their grandfather, with his mouth full of bread. "This

is no time to come home, as I have told you often enough. Be smart, now, and get along with your suppers, and be glad you've got any."

After this grace, the two boys sat down, rather subdued, and began to eat the great hunks of bread-and-butter that Liddy had given them. The entire party was too hungry to speak for a time, but at length Fred, having finished his mug of tea, pushed it across to his sister, breaking the silence as he did so.

- "Is this all the bread I'm going to get?"
- "All the bread, indeed!" Liddy retorted, with an elderly air. "En't it enough?"
 - "I'm proper leary,1 Lid."
- "Well, leary you will be. You would be the first to sing out if there were nothing for breakfast."
- "Let me have a look at they boots of yours," Bob Garrett said suddenly, while Fred was eyeing the small remains of his supper.

Getting up from his chair, Fred turned round and held up each foot for inspection, with an indifferent air.

"You bin up to they tricks of yours again," said his grandfather, frowning. "'Ten't good enough for you to see your boots wore out in a couple of months, I suppose. You must get rippin' the soles up agen anything you set your eyes on. Next time I see you done it, you will get a leathering, and don't forget it!"

There was a pause, and then the tired voice, still 'Hungry.

alive with sensitive modulations, continued: "Now, lad, don't take on. I would not chastise' you if 'twasn't that I en't got no choice. If you have done your supper, you can cut along and load your old dad's pipe for'n."

As Fred, his troubles forgotten, hastened to carry out the nightly ceremony, his brother, finishing his last mouthful, thrust out his arms on the table.

"I will tell you something about Fred," he announced largely. "He is proper soft, I reckon. Why, if he weren't stroking a worm 'smorning!"

"Get along with you! What is this you have been up to, Fred?" his grandfather asked, puzzled and amused.

"I en't done nothing."

"Don't listen to him, dad," Tom shouted. "We found a great worm—nigh a span and a half long—up at school, and Billy Rideout he said as 'twould make a hull bunch of worms if 'twas cut up, like; and just as he were going to cut'n with his knife Fred hollers out: 'Oh, don't hurt'n!'—'Don't hurt'n,' he says. And Billy hadn't scarce cut'n up before Fred jumped at it, and blubs out: 'Oh, pore worm!' and starts stroking'n!"

Tom's narrative was interrupted for a moment by the necessity to free himself from Fred, who, scarlet with mortification, was impotently assaulting him.

- "I didn't stroke it!" Fred shouted. "I was just pushing it into hes hole."
- "Pushin' it, you softie!" Tom mocked. "What for do you want to go pushin' it?"
 - "So's you shouldn't hurt it. 'Tain't right."
- "Hark at him!" said Tom, delighted. "'Ten't hardly a week since he was dusting they sparrers' eggs!"
- "Now, Tom, you leave your brother alone," his grandfather ordered, thinking that things had gone far enough. "If you was as quick at your schooling as Fred, 'twouldn't harm you. That clapper of yours is getting too loose. 'Twill be a good job when your schooling is over. You will have less spunk in you when you have done a day's work, 'stead of mucking about with worms half the time."

Supper ended gloomily, as it often did. The bestnatured man in the world hardly could have failed to
be querulous at times in Bob Garrett's place. When
he reached home in the evening, more often than not
tired out, the menace of failure seemed very near.
Year after year he had struggled on, never earning
more than eighteen shillings a week, except during the
harvest, the gains from which nearly always were
mortgaged before they were received. It was, indeed,
his racial optimism alone that enabled him to persist
in his wearying task, and at times it failed him.
Reduced to extremity by a series of unforeseen misfortunes, he would say: "I don't know how I show

manage now," but even then he knew, or felt rather than knew, that he would contrive to win through somehow. In the evening, when body and mind were least resistant, the spectre of sickness or accident sometimes would haunt him, especially when, as was too often the case, his sick-club payments, his only rock of succor, had fallen in arrears.

But these moods of depression were usually mastered before long. And later that evening Bob Garrett was seen in a happier, more characteristic mood. The boys, having undressed in the warm kitchen, had gone to bed in the room they shared with their grandfather, while Liddy, reluctant to retire to her own cupboard-like bedroom, still lingered before the fire.

- "You haven't forgot you was going to take me to Pricehurst termorrow, have you, dad?" Liddy asked, standing silhouetted against the firelight, her face turned towards her grandfather, who was sitting in his old wheel-back Windsor armchair.
- "I en't forgot, Lid. Though I don't hardly know what we are to do with they boys."
- "Couldn't they come too, dad?" Liddy suggested coaxingly.
 - "En't Fred too small?"
- "Why, think how he walks, dad! And if he was tired, couldn't you make shift to carry'n part of the way home?"
- "Oh dear! You will be wanting an old horse for your dad next!"

- "Do let him, dad!"
- "Well, I will see about it. You had best cut along to bed now, Liddy. You're a reg'lar gal for Pricehurst, en't you?"
 - "Yes, dad. I like it. But only with you."
- "Get along with you, trying to get round your old dad like that!"

Left alone by the dying fire, Bob Garrett sat huddled in his chair enjoying warmth and indolence for half an hour before himself going to bed. Already most of those in the village were asleep, but he had always been one for late hours, and it was usually nearer halfpast nine than nine o'clock before he was in bed. the soft light, his face looked less wrinkled and seared than it did in the daytime, but, even so, it looked weathered and rugged, and its owner's gathering years were shown by the falling away of his flesh about the tendons on his neck, and by his wrists, thin and wasted. vet still capable of incredible endurance. He did not at all resemble the conventional cottager who appears in parish magazines, a rosy-faced peasant with placid innocence in his eyes. He was, indeed, a decidedly dirty man, with a darkly flushed face, who breathed stertorously, and from time to time spat loudly into the fire as he sat sucking at his short inverted clay pipe, the foulness of which was of value to those who, like himself, at times had to draw consolation from an empty bowl.

Tired as he was, Bob Garrett lingered in his chair,

unwilling to forego the only real physical relaxation he enjoyed during the day. Nearly every domestic operation took place in the kitchen where he sat, and the air was vitiated and smelt strongly of rank tobacco. cheap soap, forgotten meals and washing, in which mixture the fusty smell of corduroy persisted. But to him such a drawback was nothing. The fetid atmosphere, which assailed him each evening on his return. represented comfort. As he sat stagnating in his chair. the room merely felt pleasantly warm, and warmth was a thing to be courted, since fuel was scarce and dear, and the cold rains or iron frosts of the winter slowly and insistently bit deeper, bringing with them crabbed rheumatism and aching limbs, reduced ability and, at the end, fatal incapacity. A stuffy room, rich with smells, and warm enough to bedew the windows, brought the drowsiness that helped to enable a man to overlook a stomach that was never too full. And other things besides the warmth added to the feeling of contentment. The kitchen would not have looked very attractive to a stranger. Low-pitched, with windows so small that they admitted little light, even at midday, the room looked dirty and crowded. ceiling was patched and stained with smoke, the walls were grimy with the accumulated stains of years. Here and there were colored supplements from old Christmas numbers-Queen Victoria with a broad blue sash from shoulder to waist; a group of children enjoying a ride in a farm-cart; and a small girl on tiptoe handing a posy to a benevolent and whiskered old man in a hospital ward. In the corner was a collection of old tools—a fork, a reaping-hook, a dibblingiron, the swingel of a flail and the haft of a scytheall past work, but kept and prized for some virtue of setting or temper that had made them especially handy in their day. So do the more prosperous preserve the horse that is too old for service, and, seeing him browsing in a paddock, remember, and find pleasure in remembering, noteworthy deeds of long ago that man and beast together achieved. And Bob Garrett, now and again fingering those old implements, the handles of which long usage had polished like silk, would remember, and smile as he remembered, how with fork or scythe he had turned or mown so great an acreage in so short a time in years gone by.

All these familiar things made the room seem friendly, but apart from them Bob Garrett felt affection for unobtrusive heirlooms, preserved, not as curios or objects of superficial pride, but because long familiarity with the things themselves, and with their past owners, had imbued them with a subtly endearing quality. The old eight-day clock which in that same room for a hundred years or more had ticked a mellow reminder of his parents and his own mortality, until that ominous reminder seemed merely a friendly voice; the wheel-back chair in which his father had sat before him; the dresser on which his mother had set out her blue crockery when she was a newly married girl; the

brown stoneware mug and Stafford-ware farm-jug, depicting plough, rake and pick, which had belonged to his grandfather—each helped to give the room, for him, a quality possessed by no other room in the world. ministered, had it been realized, to a subconscious recognition that its owner was not merely a labeled unit, but a complex entity, bound by a thousand imperceptible strands to his environment, almost, indeed, an essential part of that environment. And the selfreliance that sprang from such a recognition was strengthened by other objective factors. When a man has lived over fifty years in one home, he becomes familiar with every crack and feature of its fabric, can remember how and when this or that old chimney-pot was substituted for an even older chimney-pot, and his mind is full of peaceful memories of the place, of rotation after rotation of vegetables and flowers growing and coming to fruition in a garden in which every particle of soil at one time or another has passed through Such familiarity, as being lasting and his hands. more stable than any between himself and his fellows. cannot fail to create with him who experiences it a relationship more subtle, more profound than ordinarily exists between owner and property.

Bob Garrett himself, of course, was not aware of this relationship. His mental outlook, if shrewd, was simple and direct. Even had such a theory been suggested to him, he would have failed to understand its more subtle aspects, probably would have considered it a "queer notion," and dismissed it as such. But it was no less real for being unrecognized, and together with his unabashed and fully justified pride in himself as one who was more highly skilled in his calling than most of his fellows, whose labors resulted in good work well done, it supported his self-reliance, aiding him in innumerable ways, and fortified him for the strife he waged against the disabilities that were his destiny.

Before undressing that night, Bob Garrett went to the door to see if there were any signs of the thaw he had predicted, and as he crossed the threshold a breath of undeniably milder, sweeter air fanned his cheek, and scattered drops of fine rain fell upon his upturned face.

"Comin' on for a dirty night," he muttered contentedly, and peered out into the darkness, where it was obvious that a profound change was taking place as the frost reluctantly but indubitably relaxed its hold. It was as if the earth, like some sleeping princess, stirred after a long sleep, released by the kiss of the thaw. The village itself was dark and still, and he was about to shut the door, when, from the only cottage that still showed a light, a shrill, mirthless laugh rang out, dying suddenly as if smothered in the black night. For a moment he stood listening, but no other sound followed, and with a shake of the head he went indoors, reflecting that he would sleep all the more snugly for the rain outside.

Ш

The cottage, from which that solitary laugh had sounded, stood on the outskirts of the village, not far from Bob Garrett's little home. It belonged to a man named George Dean, who, twelve years before, had inherited his father's business as carrier between Pricehurst and a group of villages, among which was Fid-In addition to van, horses, his cottage and a good-sized piece of ground, he possessed an attractive personality, friendly, easy-going and good-natured. which was worth a great deal to him in his calling. But less than a year after his father died, George Dean was enslaved by a girl he met in Pricehurst, whose appearance at once betrayed a gipsy strain, which after dilution by who knows how many generations of native stock had reappeared in her, vigorous and apparently unweakened, as an old malady recurs after vears of seeming immunity.

This girl became Harriet Dean, and began her life at Fidding handicapped by a traditional hostility to the race from which her alien forbears had sprung, a hostility she did little to overcome. The enmity with which she was received, indeed, seemed to feed the sombre sullenness which was her prevailing mood. Careless of all eyes, she neglected, as if purposely, the most rudimentary observances of domestic propriety, which imposed themselves upon the village with an

inflexibility unsurpassed even by the dictates of religious conduct. Before long she had reduced her husband's neat cottage, with its ingenuous rustic porch and span-wide border of pansies beneath its windows, to a state of disreputable chaos. It was as if a spruce young man had suddenly mislaid razor and soap. Even the garden and field suffered, perhaps because her husband lost heart, as well he might when his attempts to keep "a bit of color" in his garden were constantly thwarted by a wife who made it a repository for bottles, tins and ashes. Harriet's sullenness alone might have been bearable. Good-natured George Dean might have continued to tidy his borders with gallant but unavailing reiteration, had not that sullenness alternated with sudden spats of spirit which with hot ingenuity probed his soul in the quick, and stimulated him, long-suffering and docile as he was, not only by temperament but also by breeding, into revengeful thrusts as vindictive if not as subtle as her own.

By the time their only child, Sally, was born, the village had accepted the Deans as a man may accept an ineradicable but disgusting blemish. The nickname "Hammer and Tongs," which was bestowed upon them, was a sign of a characteristic attempt to make the best of their presence, while a feeling of sympathetic loyalty to one monstrously dowered by destiny made most of the men in the village maintain a halting relationship with George Dean himself, although few hesitated to criticize him with zestful freedom. No

one, however, would consort with Harriet, and the temperament her neighbors sought to chastise, itself chastised her by distilling from the most trivial occurrences imaginary refinements of hostility. Uncaredfor, and uncaring, eaten at heart by a smouldering fire, she became increasingly bitter against her husband; and the cottage, by which alone she could display her defiance of opinion, became increasingly unsightly and unkempt.

On that evening, when everyone else remembered that Charley Clarke was ill, and browbeat uproarious children into submissive quiet, Harriet perversely happened to be in a mood of reckless hilarity, which was all the more unfortunate because the Clarkes' cottage was scarcely twenty yards away, and on that still night her strident laugh could not fail to be audible to the sick man. Usually such outbursts of Harriet's were spent in goading George Dean—a prey so easy that she seldom obtained any satisfaction from the pursuit. That night, however, George made a determined effort to silence her.

"That will do, Harriet," he said angrily, when her laughter became almost hysterically bitter. "En't you got no feeling for poor Charley Clarke? With such a rumpus going on, it's little enough sleep he will get."

"Why should I have any feeling for him, or for that Kate of his?" Harriet retorted. "She hasn't shown none for me, as I have heard. The sooner he dies the better, sims to me. You will both get your wish then."

"What do you mean by that, I would like to know?"

"En't you had your mousey eyes on her this I dunno how long? He will scarce be cold before you are sneaking after her, I lay! A good riddance, too. I don't want you. 'Twas a poor day for me when I first set eyes on you."

"I won't have you speak so!" George exclaimed angrily. "Say what you will about me. 'Tis all a parcel of lies, as I'm used to, or ought to be. But you kip that tongue of yours off Mrs. Clarke. Do you hear!"

"Ah! I am not deaf—nor blind neither. I see you lick your lips over by the fire, thinking I was not looking your way."

So the shafts sped, crudely fashioned to wing a crude quarry, until George, drained to the lees of expostulation, had recourse to intimidation by noise.

"Hold your row, blast you!"

At that Harriet laughed, a sudden, limpid ripple.

"Oh, I can make a noise too," she said, rising. And then, with a change of mood: "You are 'shamed of me, en't you? You are thinking as all they Rideouts, and Pertwoods, and the rest of them are saying: 'Pore old George, there's his —— of a missus at it again!" Seizing a zinc bowl (that served as the family bathroom) and the short poker from the fender, she flung open the cottage door and began to beat one upon the other with sardonic delight.

"Now you have got something to think about—you and the lot of them!" she said, when she returned, and flung her instruments into a corner. Then, turning, her glance fell on a small figure crouching on the rickety little stair that led to the upper floor. Sally, her wide-eyed interest changing to instinctive fear, crept away.

"I see you! Get off to your bed, you little slut!" her mother called, and her first sharp tones suddenly modulating, repeated almost endearingly, as if to herself: "You little slut!"

IV

The next day was a Saturday, and Bob Garrett, having promised to take the children into Pricehurst, contrived to reach home in time to start before it was dark. They set out by the footpath that led over the hills, dipped into the next valley, and then ran up through a wooded rise from the summit of which could be seen the town itself, lying like a jeweled locket in the plain beneath, the low sun flashing back from innumerable windows, and enriching with warm light its terra-cotta houses. By taking that path, instead of going round by road, fully a mile was saved, but at the cost of a good deal of clambering, which, however, was only really noticeable on the return journey, when the villagers, usually laden with heavy baskets, would

say: "These here hills haven't grown no shorter since the rain," a pleasantry that, after repetition on innumerable days, in foul and fair weather, had become an almost inevitable part of the ceremonial attending expeditions to Pricehurst.

Before Bob Garrett and the children had walked far. however, night fell, the black night of a moonless countryside, when unhampered progress is dependent on a minute familiarity with the surroundings. the time the last range of hills had been climbed, the town had faded in the gathering dark, and the sky was glowing faintly with a dull red, like that of a distant fire, serving as a beacon to mark their destination. For a time they walked in silence. Bob Garrett thinking of nothing in particular, the children speculating with mild excitement upon what lay before them, such excursions being rare enough for the sights of the streets and the gay shop windows to have retained a charm. alluring and strange, like that which a theatre in the pantomime season possesses for more sophisticated children.

When they entered Pricehurst, all three at first were dazzled by the light after the darkness of the fields. The children felt self-conscious even in the artisan quarter through which lay their way. Every lamppost seemed to throw a searching, almost an accusing, light upon them; to exhibit them to the town-dwellers with an insistence at once unaccustomed and disconcerting. But before long the shops began to cast their

spell. They were insignificant, but dazzling enough after that kept by Mrs. Honeyman, the only shop-keeper in Fidding.

"Oh, dad, I should like some of they lollies," Fred sighed, with eyes roving along a row of bottles in a sweetshop window. Mrs. Honeyman's aniseed balls, pear drops and sugar-sticks seemed but poor relations to these prismatic nobility.

"I dare say you would," his grandfather answered good-naturedly. "But halfpence don't grow on gooseberry bushes, nor never did, as I heard."

On such occasions, however, Bob Garrett was tempted to recklessness, and he entered the shop.

"Two-ha'porths of they sweets, please, missus," he said, giving the order in an offhand manner that certainly was not justified. "These nippers of mine have got a reg'lar sweet tooth."

"We was all young once, after all," said the woman behind the counter philosophically. "A little bit of something sweet will do them good, I dessay, after their walk. You don't live in Pricehurst, do you?"

"No; out to Fidding."

"Fidding! You are to have a change, out your way, so I hear."

"Ah?"

"Well, I did hear as Mr. Mannering was going to live out your way. They say as he means to build himself a house, with water and everything laid on. He is the lawyer in Abbey Place, as I dare say you have heard of."

"Well, that's news," said Garrett, with interest. His mind at once sprang to practical details. "He will be leading the water from the hill, I s'pose. He would be having a tank somewheres—'tis a good fall. Building a house, is he? Wonder's I ha'n't heard naught of it. I dessay he will be buying a plot of ground. He would be wanting a bit of garden and that. Going to build, is he? He will be giving the job to Fortune or Capper, I suppose. . . . Well, we must be getting on. Good-night to you."

Their marketing done, Bob took the children to see the High Street, and other thoroughfares where the wealthy did their shopping, and then turned in for a glass of fourpenny ale at "The Haunch of Venison," a small public-house at which visitors from neighboring villages were accustomed to gather on Saturday nights before setting out for home.

When they entered, the bar was crowded with men and women, and the air thick with the gray smoke of shag and twist. Everyone was in a quiet good humor, and a babel of homely speech, fat with rich vowels, met the ear like the drone in a bee-haunted lime. On a bench under the window, two or three women sat talking, with heavy-laden baskets at their feet, and mugs of porter in their hands. In front of the fire, a group of men were discussing the relative merits of "Dunbars" and "Magnum bonums," one of them, an

old man with thick white eyebrows, so absorbed that he kept raising his mug of beer from the chimneypiece and replacing it untasted, as the argument caught him again in its toils.

When Bob Garrett and the children entered the bar, the woman behind the counter warmly greeted him.

"Why, Mr. Garrett, I declare! You are a stranger!"

"So I be. 'Ten't often I'm to Pricehurst. Mr. Dunn keeping nicely?"

"Oh yes, thanks. What will you be taking?"

Having received a mug of beer, Bob Garrett moved away to let others give their orders. The children, in those days not debarred from entry, found a seat near the fire, and having received a sup of their grandfather's beer, "to put heart" into them, waited while he exchanged a few words with various friends. But it was not long before he rejoined them, and they moved for home, passing from the warm bar into streets that by contrast seemed dim and bleak. It was too early for the majority of those who lived beyond the town to return, and few were going their way. But just before they reached the bridge that was known as Town End they overtook a woman who, with a bulging string bag, was making towards the road from which branched the path to Fidding.

"Why, if it en't Mrs. Clarke!" said Bob Garrett, when they came up with her. "I hardly thought to see you to-night, Mrs. Clarke, with your Charley so

poorly. You will be in a hurry to get home, I suppose?"

"Yes, I be, Mr. Garrett. I don't like to leave him to himself longer than I can help."

"How is he doing? He en't no worse, I hope?"

"He was sadly vesterday. 'I don't feel as I could eat anything, Kate,' he says, and 'twas no more than a drop of tea he had all the day. But he seemed to take a turn for the better this morning, and this afternoon he thought he would fancy a nice bit of pork for his supper, so, as I had to go to Pricehurst, I thought I would see if I could get a chop at Mr. Bailey's, in Bridge Street. Beautiful meat hes is, always. Gets his beasts from Breede, t'other side of Farley St. Mary, he do. Dr. Ryder says he didn't ought to have nothing but wash. But it don't seem enough, not to my mind, and he said he would fancy a bit of pork, you see. Dr. Ryder was wishful to send him over to the hospital. 'Not while I stand,' I tells him. 'Oh, but he will be so much better there,' he says. 'There is nurses and doctors and good food and medicine always at hand.' 'I don't know so much about that,' I says. 'His home is the place for'n.'"

"Can't I go to the hospital, dad?" Fred pleaded in parenthesis.

"You'll go there quick enough, if you en't a good boy," answered his grandfather. "He's the ready one, Mrs. Clarke. Must have his nose in everything, same as everybody else!" "Ah, he knows which side the knife's sharp on!"

"If there is anything Liddy can do by way of helping, she will be ready. Won't you, Lid? You have only to say the word, Mrs. Clarke."

"Thank you kindly, Mr. Garrett, I will let you know if there is. I am that vexed I en't able to come and give you a hand while my old man is poorly. I have my hands full without, as you know."

"Don't let that bother you, Mrs. Clarke. We get along all right. And Charley en't going to be laid up long, I hope," said Bob sympathetically.

For a time they plodded on in silence, but before they had gone far, Mrs. Clarke, a good-natured little woman, turned to Liddy.

"Feeling tired, dear?" she asked kindly. "You don't sim to have much to say."

"No, thank you, not very," answered Liddy shyly.

"She never was much of a hand at talking, as you know, Mrs. Clarke," Garrett explained. "She takes after my old woman."

"I be tired, dad," interposed Fred, who was beginning to feel the weight of his ten years, after the scenes and small excitements of the afternoon.

"I will take my oath you are!" said his grandfather, amused. "'Ten't often you don't get your spoke in. Well, I s'pose 'tis a lift you are after. Here, Tom, catch hold on this basket, while I take your brother." The arrangement completed, Bob Garrett returned to the interrupted conversation.

Takes after her grandma, Liddy do. She "Ah! was just the same. Always simmed too busy to talk. You'd hardly mind her, I suppose, Mrs. Clarke? 'Twas before you come to Fidding. She was a proper old-fashioned gal. If 'twasn't the washing and that, 'twas making a drop of cowslip wine. She was a rare hand at anything of that sort. Used to bake her own bread in what is now old Isaac's. It used to belong to a party by the name of Wiseman, at the time. Old Mrs. Wiseman, she didn't mind. Used to have half the village baking there, one time and another. Rare hand at rippin' he was, too. Why, there weren't nothing she didn't put her hands to, hardly. So long as it didn't make too big a hole in your pocket. made no iam, of course ---"

"There used to be a lot more of that in the old days," Mrs. Clarke answered. "My old dad, he used to keep his pigs and a cow, 'sides a handful of poultry, over to Middingsly. He used to have a tidy patch of wheat, too, so I've heard, though 'twas before my time."

"There's bin a smart lot of changes since them days. And I hear there is like to be another. Have you heard of a Mr. Mannering?"

"Would that be him as took Little Hinneys?"

"No, 'ten't he. 'Tis one as is a lawyer in the town. Sims he's thinking of building a house in Fidding;

least he will have to build, there en't anywheres he can go else."

- "You never mean to say! Well, fancy that now! He will be meaning to live there, then?"
 - "So it sims."
- "A little place like Fidding, after Pricehurst! Oh, dear! won't it be a change for'n!"

Such simple chatter beguiled the rest of the way for the two elders, and the children had to entertain themselves with their own thoughts, although when the path was wide enough Liddy and Tom paired off and talked together about school and their small affairs. Fred, on his grandfather's shoulders, listened apathetically to the conversation that went on beneath him, until his grandfather, considering that the boy was sufficiently rested, set him down, when he proceeded to count his footsteps in a monotonous undertone.

"I'm sure it's a masterpiece the way you've managed to bring up they children like you have. Always so neat and proper as they look," said Mrs. Clarke, eyeing Liddy's tidy figure.

"'Ten't as if they was rough by nature, you see," Bob answered. "Liddy is a proper old-fashioned party. 'Tis a treat to see her looking after her brothers, the spit of an old hen with a couple of biggish ducklings, she is. It makes me laugh when I think of it sometimes. But I don't hardly know how I would have done without her. And of course 'tis yourself,

Mrs. Clarke, as has done more nor anyone. 'Tis easier now as they are coming on, but when I first had them, they was too small to do much more nor put their own clothes on."

"Hark at that Fred, a-counting to himself," said Mrs. Clarke, smiling. "He is sharp enough, by all I hear. 'Ninety-eight, ninety-nine,' he goes. 'Ten't many youngsters like him as would be able to count like he do."

"Ah, you are right. He is a proper young scholar, he is. I am proud of'n. Still, schooling en't going to teach him his work. He has got too many queer notions in hes head. It don't seem right to me for a lad to be like he is sometimes. Now, Tom en't like that. He's a reg'lar boy, he is. He is the one for nesting, and a pint of tricks. I don't altogether hold with all he and they other young cautions is up to, at times. But I would like to see Fred with a bit more spunk in him. Sims he has taken to strokin' worms now!"

Mrs. Clarke's exclamation, "Whatever do you mean?" gave Bob the opportunity to repeat the story Tom had told at supper the night before. "I told Tom not to get at him so," he ended. "Not but what a bit of a tease don't do Fred no harm."

"Well, it do sim queer in a boy," Mrs. Clarke agreed. "Yet I always did take to Fred."

"He is wonderful fond of gardening, too," Bob explained, with an attractive pride in showing off

"his youngsters." "Proper little gardener he be. Him and old Luke is as thick as thieves. He is off there sharp enough most evenings."

"I have seen him often enough. 'Ten't many youngsters as Mr. Medlar will bide like he do Fred."

Fidding, when they reached it, lay like a herd of cows opening pale yellow eyes in the darkness. As they passed the inn, someone entering let out a rush of voices, which when it ceased left no sound except the bubbling of the stream to disturb the night.

٧

A week later, at dawn, Fidding lay folded in thick white mist, which garlanded the hedgerows with tangles of dewdrops on every cobweb. Jacob Pertwood, the shepherd, when he took a cup of tea up to his wife before setting out with his blue shag sheep-dog, Watch, told her the day was thick enough to cut, but that the sun would be shining before noon. "Like enough 'twill be hottish, too," he added, guided not only by experience of many similar mornings in uneventful years, but also by the same instinct that made the dog wrinkle his nose at the fog and then wind with undulating back round his master's legs, appreciating some premonitory quality even then present in the air.

Within a few hours, Jacob's forecast was justified. The mist rolled back upon itself, as if dissolving, and

the sun, at first palely appearing, gathered increasing strength and harried from the valley the last attenuated scarves of white which wound among the trees, revealing, like a map unrolled, a landscape dotted and checkered with buildings and fields. From Old Man's Neck, a narrow saddle-back ridge on the hills above the vicarage, the village could be seen lying compact and bright like a model. In its single street there was little sign of life, and little movement. Here and there from cottage chimneys wisps of smoke rose in the still air. The sound of metal ringing on metal came from Bell the smith's workshop. Nanny Pertwood, the old shepherd's wife, appeared at her door to make sure that drying airs were abroad. Now and then, a woman made a journey to water-butt or pump.

But Fidding, although stagnant, looked gracious even at that season when trees were bare, and few flowers blossomed in its gardens. The steep hillside at the foot of which it lay, not only sheltered it from northerly winds, but also set off the weathered walls of cottages, and their mellowed thatch, touched here and there with bright new straw, and its occasional tiled roofs, which later would blaze with the ochre of stonecrop. Then, when summer dowered the country-side with a profusion of loveliness, the village possessed a greater charm. The stream was shaded with thick foliage, its banks were pied with loosestrife, forget-me-not and comfrey. Nearly every garden was a posy of wall-flowers, marigolds, sweet-williams, nas-

turtiums, golden-rod, and Maiden's Blush roses that glowed in rich transfusions through the months. looked so fragrant without that the casual visitor was apt to forget that the homely cottages bowered with rose and clematis possessed dark secrets: that in them young men and women lay down together, cramped and crowded in their few rooms, that too often the little recessed windows which admitted the scantiest light did not open, and that there came times when wells were dry, and the inmates, however tired or busy, were forced to carry every drop of water they used from the river some distance away. The flowers on which the visitor lavished praise cannot be watered then, when in the majority of cottages the water that washes the dishes has to wash the inmates afterwards. if indeed it is not needed to wash the dishes again next dav.

From Old Man's Neck, each well-known feature could be identified in the landscape that lay patterned and quartered below. A rich, dark square beyond the Gate Inn marked the "Ten Acre," the finest pasture in the parish, the turf of which had lain unbroken for a century, gathering with each year greater succulence and richness. Behind it, masked by squat hedges, lay the fat fields of Lads' Lane Farm. Over towards Fidding Minnis and Belhanger, straddling the river, stood the coppice that provided countless generations of children with largess of primrose and wild hyacinth, which each year were joyfully plucked, only to be

strewn along the homeward track, or languish in jamjars as invalids, sick from too loving pressure of small Behind the vicarage, sloping upwards to the spreading fringe of the woods, was the glebe-field, tenanted by a fat, rough-coated pony. On summer evenings its upper edge, beneath the overhanging boughs of the trees, was alive with rabbits eating their herbage suppers, smoothing whiskers, or loping easily on long pads to richer feasts of dandelion, until a passing figure, in the road beneath, set the whole stretch of turf in motion with scurrying forms, as if it were a sea upon whose green waves scudded, tossed, and scattered an armada of innumerable little brown skiffs. on the left lay the small field belonging to George Dean. Two horses browsed in it, and a number of chickens ran about seeking provender to take the place of the grain Harriet had forgotten to scatter for them.

In some indefinite way, the field contrived to look untidy, to be the single blot among those many meadows; as if the hand of its mistress had left its mark there, as it had left it on her home, which reputable folk passed with an unconscious air of reserve.

From the high vantage of the hills, on that spring morning, even the figures of those who took part in the ancient routine of the countryside could be identified. Far up the valley, a steadily gliding dot showed where Watch accompanied his master to an outlying fold. In the rickyard at Bentwood Farm two men were cutting fodder from a stack. Joe Tarlett, stand-

ing in the tail of his cart, was jogging briskly to collect a load of beans for delivering in Pricehurst. Farther away, in a field by Lads' Lane Farm, James Rideout walked up and down, the measured swing of his arm showing that he was hand-sowing clover. Following him. Bob Garrett, with a harrow, walked at his horses' heads, to and fro, down the dip and up again, in an unhurrying skein, the whole action so regular and methodical that even the checks at either end of the field seemed to become blended in the whole motion, and the faint periodic cry of "Hup!" to a team that instinctively went through the complex motions of turning, merely a slow rhythmic beat completing recurring cycles. Everywhere, in the village and in the surrounding country, there was an activity, seen or unseen, voluntary or involuntary. Both nature and mankind were busied with the business of spring.

Towards noon, the majority of the workers ceased their labors as if by common consent. A few, among whom was Bob Garrett, began to trudge back towards the village. The others assembled in small groups, in barns or under hedges, and produced the soft rush baskets, and platters knotted in spotted handkerchiefs, in which their dinners were carried.

Such a group settled in a sheltered corner nearly two miles from the village, and began to adjust thick slabs of bread and cold bacon or cheese with dirty fingers and thumbs. It consisted of James Rideout, Dicky Tewson, and George Vines, of whom the last two had been spreading manure. Scarcely had they begun upon their meal when the sound of a bell, faint but clear, drifted down the valley.

"One—two—three . . . one—two—three," Rideout counted. "That will be poor Charley Clarke."

"Ah! that's him, right enough," Tewson agreed soberly. "'Tis little I thought to hear that bell ring for him so soon. 'Tis what my missus says. 'You never know how 'twill be,' she says. 'You speak sharp to-day, but maybe I shall be gone to-morrow, and then who is going to do for you? You never know how 'twill be,' she says."

"Ah!" Rideout tactfully assented, well knowing the clash of temperaments between the usually cheerful Dicky Tewson and his serious-minded wife.

"'You never know,' she says," Tewson persisted.

"Here be Charley Clarke. 'Ten't many days since he was as smart a chap as most. You wouldn't hardly have thought any mortal sickness could have got hold of he. I mind hes saying as he never was sick in his life as he could remember, 'cept one time as he ett some rotten fruit as old Dodd, what used to have Lads' Lane, give him."

"Ah, he was always saying what a tough chap he was," Rideout agreed. "Poor Mrs. Clarke! she have had a time. My missus give her a hand now and again, but 'tweren't as if we was neighbors. She has no one to look to, living where she do, with Bob Garrett next door as needs a hand himself, and they Deans.

Old Jane Begood, she en't no use to nobody, poor soul, and Henry Farthing's missus with a newcomer, and not about yet. She en't hardly lain down since Charley was took queer."

"I wonder what she will do," Tewson speculated.

"She won't hardly be able to keep her house, and there is several as will be after it, if she don't."

"I dessay there be," said Rideout, "but they won't get it. She won't go. She en't one to give up. She will be doing something before long, and take a lodger, too, very like."

As the sound of the bell sped through lane and pasture, carrying its message to the remotest parts of the valley, conversations like that above awoke in the places it visited, conversations that for a moment skirted the profounder implications of the news only to plunge shortly afterwards into the more familiar, concrete questions it raised.

VI

A few days later, the sound of sawing ceased in the little workshop belonging to Henry Farthing, the wheelwright, and was followed by the soft, long-drawn rip of a plane, and a brisk tapping, so that all the village knew the progress made with Charley Clarke's coffin. Joe Tarlett, as General Manager of the Fidding Sick and Burial Club, paid a semi-official visit of inspection that was quite unnecessary, and in reality

prompted by a certain guilty interest in the proceedings. Mournfully he surveyed the work, but his eye quickened as, with finger and thumb, he felt a neat mortise, tried a side, and found the workmanship good.

Before long, Farthing ran his rule over the coffin, trundled the latter off on a hand-cart to Mrs. Clarke's cottage, and, in his best and most unyielding suit, stood bareheaded in the churchyard, while the vicar, with heavy boots protruding from beneath his cassock, read the Burial Service to a little group of men and women, among whom stood the widow, weeping sadly, but for a time the most important person in the community.

All the men who were present had voluntarily forfeited half a day's work and pay, and directly the service was over hurried off to make the best of the remaining hours of daylight. Among these was Bob Garrett, who, with inherent conscientiousness, continued working so late that when he eventually reached home the children had finished their supper, and with the exception of Liddy had gone to bed. As soon as her grandfather had finished his meal. Liddy, herself, went to bed, leaving him smoking in front of the fire. It was a still night, and the only sounds audible were the murmuring voices of the children overhead, the flutter of flames in the grate, and the ticking of the clock. Before long Bob Garrett's chin sank upon his chest, and, with pipe in mouth, he fell asleep, as he often did at such times, only to wake, as a rule, within a few minutes and clamber reluctantly to bed. But

that night a sudden clamor of voices in the cottage occupied by the Deans made him raise his head almost as soon as he fell asleep. That, he reflected, was Harriet's shrill laugh, and that was George Dean's voice, strangely loud, shouting an imprecation.

"'Tis about time somebody put that durned woman away," Bob thought angrily. "'Twould be bad enough if she kept her row at home, let alone disturbing the hull place. And on such a night ——"

But as quickly as it arose, the clamor faded and died into utter stillness. There was nothing to be heard by Bob Garrett, who, sitting up in his chair, listened with angry intensity. Realizing that it was too late for another nap, he stooped down and unlaced his boots, afterwards fetching the kettle to place it among the dying embers, which would keep the chill off and make it boil more quickly in the morning. As he was crossing the room with the kettle in his hand, the cottage door slowly opened behind him. With a quick swing of astonishment, he turned to find out who this late and unexpected visitor might be, and saw, standing shyly in the doorway, her large eyes rather fearful, Sally Dean.

- "Why, Sally!" he said. "What brings you here? Nothing wrong, I hope?"
 - "Please, dad has hurt mother with a poker, bad."
- "Hurt her bad, has he?" Bob repeated slowly. "Perhaps I'd best step across."

During the short walk to the Deans' cottage, the

news conveyed by Sally began to ramify in Bob's mind, and its possibilities becoming more clearly defined, his pace quickened, until he was almost at a run. In front, only twenty paces away, he saw the cottage with light shining through the windows, and outlining the open door, through which there came no sound. That lighted doorway, and the silence beyond it, seemed minatory. Scarcely knowing what he expected to find within, Bob braced himself as he crossed the threshold. In the little kitchen stood George Dean, gazing with dazed doubt at a figure on the floor. It was Harriet, silent, lying in abandonment, with her cheek resting on the tiles and her thick black hair tumbled in loosened lustre.

"What have you done?" asked Bob seriously, and, receiving no answer, added: "En't you going to look to her, man? Come!"

George Dean moved slightly, scraping his foot with a shriek of nails upon the tiled floor.

"'Twas the poker," he said earnestly. "I was rippin' the fire."

Bob, on one knee beside Harriet, remembered Sally.

"Just run along and ask Mr. Goad if he will step along, will you, my dear?" he said.

When Sally had gone, he looked doubtfully at Harriet, who still lay impassively.

"We did ought to get Dr. Ryder," he said, "but I can't hardly ask a nipper like Sally to go as far as hes house. I will run along myself so soon as Wal'r Goad

comes." Then, with a shrewd look at George, he added: "You en't fit to go, let alone anything else."

As he turned again to Harriet, something caught his eye; and, moving her head gently, he revealed a small dark patch of blood that, soaking through her thick hair, had stained the tiles. Startled into action, he thrust his hand beneath the woman's blouse and felt her heart.

- "She's dead, if you ask me," he said, after a pause.
- "Ah," George assented, and moved a little nearer the wall.

In another minute, Walter Goad, the village policeman, was in the kitchen, staring with bulging eyes at the dead woman.

- "Oh, dear!" he exclaimed. "You en't done her in, George?"
 - "'Twas the poker," answered George vacantly.
- "I always knew how 'twould be, sooner or later. Speaking as man to man, I wonders it en't happened before," Goad said confidentially. "Still, 'tis a bad business, when all's said and done."
 - "En't you going to do nothing?" asked Bob.
- "Sims there en't much a body can do now; 'tis too late."
 - "You will have to take him in charge."
- "Ah, to be sure I shall. Now, George, I'm sorry for you, that I am, but 'tis my duty, you see. Though I don't know whatever I'm to do with you. There en't nowhere as I can put you."

"You had best wait till I fetch Dr. Ryder," Bob suggested. "I will run along now. Then you will have to take'n over to Pricehurst. You can't hardly before the doctor's bin."

"Oh, dear! I don't want to climb over they hills at this time, I'm sure," Goad said mournfully. "Do you think I ought to bind'n?"

"Will you goo with him, George?" Bob asked.

"Ah, I'll goo," George answered. "'Twouldn't be no use not to. I done her in. The poker, 'twas."

"I should tell you to be careful what you say, George," Goad reminded him. "Aught you say will be brought against you. By rights I ought to have warned you before; still, all's friends here."

"Now, Wal'r," Bob interposed, "you bide here while I fetch Dr. Ryder. 'Twon't be long before I am back."

"I will have a pipe," Goad answered. "But what are we to do with this Sally? She can't hardly stay here by herself when George and I goo."

"I will take her in along wi' my youngsters for a time," Bob said, after a moment's thought. "Liddy will let her slip into her bed."

VII

Early one morning, a few weeks later, Luke Medlar was working in his garden. With his weathered face,

his old, blue eyes, and the fringe of snowy whiskers that surrounded his face and chin like an inverted halo. he looked a gentle and kindly old man. But he was not so placid as he looked. His eyes were gentle merely by the mask of age, for his heart was bitterly jealous of his neighbors, of their cottages, and, particularly, of their gardens. Had he his way, his own garden would have been the only one in the village. As it was, his love of it was such that he could scarcely bear even to hear it praised by the owners of rival plots. That it surpassed all others in the place, and that he was always able to enter a few choice vegetables and blossoms for the Pricehurst Flower Show was due, however, not so much to any superlative skill as to the fact that he was able to spend infinitely more time on his hobby than could any one else. well able to ingratiate himself with his betters, some dozen years before he had contrived to make a severe strain in his side the pretext for throwing his accomplishments at the vicar's feet, and receiving the seals of office as gardener and odd-man at the vicarage, and keeper of the churchyard. Since that time, Luke-by virtue of his skill with certain choicer flowers dear to the vicar's wife—had become firmly rooted in his position, and there was no sight more familiar in the village than Luke sweeping the church path or trundling his wheelbarrow-laden with mowing-machine and tools—to the vicarage, except that of Luke busy in his own garden. Very often when Luke was wanted at

the vicarage for some tedious operation—such as beating carpets—it was learnt that the grass in the church-yard was in a terrible scobby state and could not last over Sunday without being trimmed, which meant that Luke pottered about with a pair of shears in the churchyard for a short time, only to find that it was necessary for him to slip across to his cottage for a few shakes—an elastic period that often lengthened into a good morning's work at thinning onions.

This increased opportunity to tend his garden bred in Luke a greater absorption in it, until his entire life became subservient to it. Living alone, without wife or children, he turned the living-room in his cottage into what was practically a residential potting-shed. There of an evening, when darkness forbade work out of doors, he would sit smoking and contemplating his little wooden trays of seedlings, or eat his supper surrounded by his stock of seed-potatoes, over which his fatherly eye would stray as he munched a home-grown onion, careless of the fact that such a demonstration of their destiny was unlikely to encourage the hair-like youngsters which were busily attaining onionhood in the surrounding trays.

In that room were a number of things that would have seemed surprisingly familiar to the vicar and his wife, had they ever troubled to visit one who benefited from their company without having to be sought. At one time or another a trowel might be mislaid, or a few flower-pots overlooked, and no one would be any

wiser than they were when, by judicious dibbling, fewer seed-potatoes than were originally bought filled the space allotted to them in the vicarage garden. Gardeners have a number of small and recognized perquisites, and one who was as jealous as Luke of the reputation of his employer's garden might occasionally discard—and afterwards himself adopt—plants that in other gardens would have seemed very well. Now and again, it is true, the vicar's wife, in passing, would look rather suspiciously at Luke's flourishing borders.

"I must say, Luke, those nemesias look to me very much like the ones we were going to bed out, and you said got some fly in them and died," she might say.

Luke had a wonderful acquaintance with flies of peculiar propensities, and even more peculiar names, which wrought terrible havoc in the vicarage garden.

"You always had a wonderful eye for flowers, 'm," Luke would answer, with respectful admiration. "'Tain't many as would have noticed such a thing. But what you says is true. They be the same nemesies. When I put they away they hadn't hardly a sign of life in them, so ett up they was by they spindle-fly. But I thought to myself as 'twere a pity to waste 'en. 'Be as 'twill, they'll do for your little plot,' I says to myself. ''Ten't as if 'twas the vicarage.' You see, 'm, I got to make things do. And when I got them home I thought as how mebbe bacca-smoke would do something for 'en. Of course I en't time to spend over everything in that way. 'Twas an experiment, as you

might say. I popped them in this little border, and give them a proper doing with my old clay pipe. On my hands and knees. 'Why, Luke, whatever be you up to now?' folks said. But it brought them round. I wouldn't hardly have believed 'twas possible."

Up and down the village twenty times a day, and in his high-perched garden when other men were far afield, Luke did not miss much that happened in Fidding. Garrulous and inquisitive, he delighted in the most minute bit of tittle-tattle, and having picked it up would embroider it with his own rather malicious readings, and retail it lavishly to all who came his way.

That morning, while he trenched with easy skill, his neighbors set off to work, and, noting the directions each took, he was able to deduce the nature of their individual occupations during the coming day.

The first to set out were those who, working in outlying places, had to be off early in order to cover the ground. Rather later came those who would be engaged within a short distance of the village. Few had time for more than a passing hail as they tramped by Luke's garden, but Dicky Tewson, who never was in a great hurry, stopped for a critical survey of Luke's labors.

"Nice morning," he said heartily, and, as Luke seemed disposed for a chat and slowly scraped his boots on his spade, approached and leant his arms on the little gate.

"Nice enough," Luke agreed, spitting thoughtfully

into his palm. "Wonders you chaps ever get out of your beds. Why, I bin up and about best part of an hour. You don't know what 'tis to work, not one of you."

"Ah! you always was a busy one," agreed Tewson cordially. "Especially if 'twas no business of yours."

"'Tis a wonder that tongue of yours don't cut your mouth, it's that sharp," Luke grunted angrily, spitting again into his palm and wiping his hand on the seat of his trousers, as earnest that he really meant to begin working again this time.

"They young onions of yours is a nice spronkey little lot," observed Tewson, who bore no malice. "What might you call they?"

"You are all alike," Luke growled. "No sooner do I get a crop of onions or taties as is better nor your own, than you are round me like greenbottles at a muck-heap. 'What are they?' you asks. 'Where did you get them?' You must have the same. En't I told you before, 'ten't the seed, but the way 'tis handled, as makes a hearty crop?"

At this moment Bob Garrett passed with a carthorse on its way to the smithy from Bentwood Farm.

"Nice morning, Luke," he called. "You be the boy for your garden, en't you? They onions of yours is coming on nicely. What do you call 'en?"

Luke glared at him ferociously. "What do I call them? 'Love's Young Dream' I call them. You go and ask for some 'Love's Young Dream' seed at Roberts, and say I sent you," he said, with a hoarse chuckle; and then furiously: "'Ten't no business of yours what they onions is called. You go home and dig, 'stead of teasing your soil. Scratch, scratch, you goes; that en't no good, nor never will be. If you want a tidy crop, no matter what 'tis, you have got to dig for'n."

"You ought to give a lecture, Luke. There en't nobody knows what you do," Bob retorted; and with a wink at Tewson went on his way.

"There's another of them," Luke said testily. "Can't kip hes greedy eye off of other folks' gardens. Got rid of that Sally Dean at last, they tells me. What he ever wanted to take her for is more than I know. En't he content with the three youngsters he has got already? He never did have much sense, to my mind. Why they all talk about him as they do, beats me. "Tis Bob this, and Bob that, and old Bob's the boy to fix that up for you, till you would think he was the only chap in the place as knew how to lace his boots."

"'Tis Mrs. Clarke has taken Sally," Tewson said, snatching a raft for himself from the maelstrom of grumbling. "Sally went over to her last night. Dessay Mrs. Clarke's glad to have her, being alone as she is. Though the gal is marked, as you might say. 'Ten't no fault of hers, so to speak, but she is that old-fashioned' herself that folks always did look queer at her."

¹ Strange.

"They say as George will have to pay for what he done right enough."

"Ah, they will fix he up sure 'nuff. He just done it in time for the Assizes. He won't have to wait more nor a week for his trial. Always unlucky was George. They say he don't sim to care what becomes of him. The only thing he simmed bothered about was the gal.—Well, I must be moving, Luke. Rheumatiz en't bin worrying you agen, I hope?"

"If it weren't for they Godsons next door, I could bear with the rheumatiz," Luke declared. "They are a reg'lar burden. If 'tisn't coming in worrying me, when I got better to do nor listen to their talk, they're talking that loud, and banging about in that kitchen of theirs till I hardly know if I'm on my head or my heels. There is hardly a day I do a bit of work in my garden without Mrs. Godson buffeting her mats and rags till the hull place is all over muck. I got no patience with her. 'Tain't neighborly."

No one who is fond of gardening can be wholly bad, and the unqualified condemnation of old Luke Medlar which took place behind his back was not altogether justified. Mischievous busybody and practised grumbler as he was, he possessed gentler qualities which only needed finding. There was one small person who, without any design, had won admission to his affection. Fred Garrett was always welcome at Luke's cottage, and possibly the fact that he was so transparently devoid of any ulterior purpose helped to

establish the favored position he held. Few days passed without Fred running off to his old friend when school was over, and a good many glances of quiet amusement were leveled at two figures so often seen in Luke's garden: Luke himself grumbling away in happy despotism, and Fred, his ten-year-old subject, serious and dirty, a willing slave hanging upon the master's lips.

This unequal friendship was of about one year's standing, and its beginning had been quite unexpected. One day during the previous summer. Fred was among a group of boys who were out for mischief. Passing Luke Medlar's garden, they saw the old man busy among his scarlet-runners. One bold youth, with that insolence that passes as wit in such circles, threw a clod of turf into the garden, and took to his heels, followed by the imprecations of his victim. A few of the boys, among whom was Fred, hovered at a discreet distance to enjoy the fun, adding to their audacity by singingwell out of arm's-length-a traditionally derisive formula: "Old Daddy Medlar! Old Daddy Medlar!" But, rather alarmed by seeing the butt of their satire advance towards his garden gate, they fled, leaving Fred alone, spellbound by curiosity. Feeling that Fred was really too insignificant to be worth wasting much energy upon, Luke merely grumbled, more to himself than to his solitary auditor: "You kids is a reg'lar handful of nettles. A good strapping is what you want. Heaving turves! Right among my young onions, too. It might have done no end of harm. I'll heave turves at you, one of these days!"

Leaving this sarcastic shaft to quiver in its victim, Luke returned to his work, only to swing round after a short time and find that Fred had approached nearer, and was staring through the hedge.

- "What are you eyeing, you young masterpiece?" Luke inquired, rather amused.
- "I was just looking at they lovely tigers," answered Fred, rather shyly.
- "Tigers! Who do you think you are getting at? 'Tis dandelions you're thinking of; and there en't none of they for you to stare at, I'll lay. Tigers!"
 - "I mean they pansies."
 - "Pansies! Why can't you say so, then?"
- "I call them tigers," answered Fred, a law to himself. "Don't you think they look like little tigers' faces? Especially the wild ones do—there's little whiskers and all."

Luke laughed, a low rumble. "Darned if you en't right!" he agreed. "Well, if that en't a caution! What else is there you has names for?"

- "I don't know—there's cats' custard, of course—primroses, that is."
 - "Ah! cats' custard. And what do you call these?"
 - "Oh, they's sweet-williams."
- "Well, you're right for once. Sims you like flowers."
 - "Yes, I do. I wish I had a garden."

- "Well, so you have: least, your dad has."
- "'Ten't like yours, Mr. Medlar."

This sincere flattery pleased Luke.

- "Would you like to larn about gardening?" he asked.
 - "Yes, I should."
- "Well, you come along next time you see me working, and maybe I will see about it. If you have a turn for it, maybe I'll find a trowel and fork for you, and fit you out proper."
 - "Oh, I should like that!"
- "Well, you do as I say. Mind, though; no more of this turf-heaving!"

That was how it began, and the chance friendship between the elderly man and the small boy ripened into a habit. Fred had inherited from some unknown source a bent for gardening, and Luke at times found him really useful, when deft fingers were needed. He found, too, Fred's conversation amusing; especially when the first diffidence wore off, and Fred began to air the thoughts and impulses that marked him in his own home as peculiar. Luke never discouraged them as did the boy's grandfather, but would accept everything with a sober "Ah!" or "Do it, now?" afterwards pulling his lower lip with a thoughtful smile.

VIII

Each day between Mrs. Clarke's cottage and the village school passed Sally, a morose little figure, sullenly conscious of the doubtful glances of which she was the object. Mrs. Clarke, whose conduct in receiving so ill-dowered a refugee was more condemned than praised, had at any rate improved the appearance of her charge. Dressed in black, and with neatly darned stockings. Sally no longer stood at a disadvantage to the other children as regards her clothing, and in personal cleanliness she was conspicuously superior. Most children of her age in Fidding not only accumulated on their hands and faces ink at school and sticky dirt in their leisure, but also ignored the relationship of handkerchiefs to noses. Sally, on the other hand, blew her nose, and washed her face and hands with a regularity that seemed a trifle uncanny to Mrs. Clarke. The latter would have had a great deal to say had anyone suggested that she was not herself cleanly. According to Fidding standards, she was, if anything, rather particular. But Fidding standards were governed by the fact that its inhabitants had little time and much to do, and no one was thought the worse for being soiled by "clean" dirt. Sally, in spite of her youth, had other ideas so far as her person went. A few days after her arrival, Mrs. Clarke had been genuinely scared by finding her in the kitchen stark-naked and washing herself all over from a zinc basin.

- "Whatever do you think you are doing, child!" she exclaimed. "Do you want to catch your death of cold?"
- "Please, mother always made me wash," Sally answered.
 - "Of course she did, but not like that, I'll be bound."
- "Yes, she did. Twice every week in the winter, and every day in the summer."
- "Do you mean to tell me she did that herself?" Mrs. Clarke asked curiously.
- "She washed like this every day—always. When dad was out, 'twas."
 - "Well, I never did!"

This was astonishing information, matter subsequently for prolonged speculation.

"Well, you slip into your things quick, now. You can wash yourself all day, if you like, my dear," she said. "I en't going to stop you. But you mustn't do it, not without telling me first. 'Twon't do for you to be laid up with a chill, and all."

And yet, the most curious part about it, as Mrs. Clarke realized in dark speculation, was that, almost finicking in her personal cleanliness, Sally was the dirtiest and most untidy creature in her work. If Mrs. Clarke gave her a pot to scour, or a bit of scrubbing to do, the pot would be left tainted, and the scrubbing would achieve little more than mess. When Mrs.

Clarke went to bed at night, she would find Sally lying asleep, as clean and sweet as cream in a dairy, but the floor would be littered with scattered clothes; and, more likely than not, the candle would be guttering all over the carpet, the grease slowly dripping through the cane-work of the chair on which the candlestick stood.

Mrs. Clarke, a kindly woman with sensitive feelings. never referred to George Dean's trial and apparently inevitable fate, saying instead that he had been taken away, and would not return for a long time. Sally was not left in doubt as to the real position. Young as she was, some of the children at the school, their curious ears primed with conversations overheard at home, managed very thoroughly to explain to her the meanings and implications of murder. After turning the matter over in her small mind, Sally lost the sorrow she had felt at being taken from her father, and at losing her mother. She began to think that the whole affair had been contrived in order to humiliate her and make her miserable. If her tormentors expected an outburst of tears or of anger, they were disappointed. Sally merely became more reserved, and avoided appearing in the village so far as possible. She began to hate everybody in the place, with the exception of Mrs. Clarke, whom she tolerated without ever feeling really sure that there was no recondite motive beneath her protector's treatment of her.

Although Sally did not forget that the way she was

treated was due to her father being a murderer, and her mother something apparently almost as bad, the personalities of her parents soon began to lose their sharpness. She began to think of George Dean as her father, and not as the more personal daddy—with its warm associations. The grudge she bore was no longer against a human personality, but against a symbol that, with added years, would become assimilated in the pure abstraction, Destiny. While he was still in the condemned cell, George Dean ceased to exist for his daughter.

When it became known that George Dean was to be hanged within a few days, Mrs. Clarke, who had discovered with deep anger what the school children had been telling Sally, determined to keep the latter away from school till it was all over. But Sally, who was no novice to the results of deserting school, felt that her adoptive mother was not very clever, and that it was only right to tell her what would happen.

"When I don't go to school, Mrs. Clarke, the 'tendance officer comes to fetch me, and then they send for you and say you ought to have sent me to school, and you have to pay a lot of money," she explained.

"I dessay it won't be the first time he will have bin after you," Mrs. Clarke answered, with a grim smile. "However, he can come, for all I care. I'm too busy what with the washing and all, and I want you to help me, dear. 'Twill be a chance to give the old house a reg'lar do-out."

"Mother used to say she couldn't spare me, too," Sally protested. "But the 'tendance officer never took no notice, and I had been playing, really."

"Ah, you never did out your house before, I'll be bound. However, there en't no call for you to worry, dear. I know they attendance officers!"

Comforted by a hazy impression that Mrs. Clarke's words implied personal friendship with the austere official, Sally said no more, and stayed at home with joy.

A few days later, when Mrs. Clarke was helping Liddy in the Garretts' cottage next door, Bob came home.

"Well, 'tis all over, I s'pose," he said sombrely.

"Yes, she've got no one left now, poor thing," answered Mrs. Clarke, guessing to what he referred. "I tried to keep her in bed this morning. It didn't sim hardly proper as she should be out and about at the time. But 'tweren't no use. Down she come, and says she couldn't lie abed. I couldn't help watching the clock. And, when the hand reached eight, there she was eatin' her breakfast, and chattering. . . . Oh, dear! it made me feel quite queer."

"Ah! most of us would act different now and again, if we only knowed. I'm sorry for the gal. She en't got too easy a time before her. There's many an eye would be cast queerly on her, even if she weren't a queer customer herself. And there is many as will look queerly at you for taking her in, Mrs. Clarke, not

that you got any call to take notice of such things. You see, she has got bad blood in her, 'ten't no use denying it. There is many as think 'twould have done Fidding no harm to be rid of her. 'Tis the same with beasts, and plants, too, for that matter: if they come of bad stock, no matter how 'tis, there's always something goes wrong with them, sooner or later."

"Folk may say what they like, 'ten't hardly likely I was going to let the gal go to the Union," Mrs. Clarke declared stoutly. "Tweren't no fault of hers."

"It won't make it any easier for you, having her—least not while she is schooling," said Bob. "I suppose you will soon be starting work at Bentwood, like you said you was going to?"

"I am seeing Mr. Mason next week about it. I didn't hardly feel as how I could start sooner, you see, and with the Club money and that I could scratch along for a bit, and have a rest."

"'Twill be hard for you at first, working out. Did you ever do anything of the sort before?"

"Lord, yes! There en't much as I haven't turned my hand to, years ago. When I was a gal, we all used to work in the fields, though there en't much they use women for nowadays, if it isn't thinning swedes and such. Back-breaking jobs, I'll allow. 'Ten't as if I could go for a reg'lar hand, same as I was a dairy-maid."

"I have bin thinking as you will hardly be able to do for us, Mrs. Clarke, when once you start with Mr.

Mason. Perhaps you would like me to see if someone will take it on."

"I don't think there's any need for you to do that, Mr. Garrett. Maybe I shan't be able to give quite so much time to it, but there is Liddy. She is getting a big gal, and 'ten't as if she wasn't able to hot up her dad's dinner, and wet the tea for'n, or maybe fry a rasher. She will be done with her schooling before long. I shall be glad to do what I can till then. And with the days drawing out, it en't hardly any trouble to pop in for an hour in the evening, or first thing. Why, my Charley was often up and out in hes old garden by four o'clock on a summer morning. He would do the best part of two hours' work before he had to be off."

Mrs. Clarke's voice faltered a little, and she touched her eyes with her apron.

"Well," she said, "I mustn't be chattering here, and keeping you from your tea."

"I dessay I could put in an hour now and again in your garden, if you en't too much time yourself," Bob suggested.

"I'm sure 'tis very kind of you, Mr. Garrett. I shan't have too much time myself, as you say."

"Well, I will see you get your taties and sauce,' even if I en't able to manage you a few touches of color."

"Oh, I could see to that. 'Tis the trenching and 'Greenstuff.

that as takes time. Well, as I said, I must be going. You will be wanting your tea, I am sure."

IX

As the months passed, Sally ceased to be the centre of speculation in the village. In the following autumn the house of which Bob Garrett had heard at the little sweet-shop in Pricehurst began to rise in a maze of scaffolding, dominating the village from the plateau that had been leveled for it above the vicarage. Towards this unsightly innovation all eyes and thoughts turned. There was not a man in the place who did not wander up to the building every few days. to examine with practical eyes the progress made in the work, and form an opinion as to the quality of the workmanship employed. Nor was there a woman who did not resort at least once in the day to pleasing speculation about the future inmates of the house, their object in coming, and the probable effect it would have on the village. The vicar had been the first to draw attention to the practical possibilities of what at first was regarded chiefly as an entertaining spectacle.

"It is bound to do a lot of good in the village when Mr. Mannering and his family settle here," he said to Luke Medlar, one day, when the latter made the new house an excuse for a conversation that interrupted

for a time the uncongenial work of mowing the vicarage lawn.

"Ah, no doubt 'twill," Luke agreed with reserve, the vicar's calling making him nervous lest the benefit foreseen was supernal.

"I mean it is bound to bring a certain amount of additional—ah—prosperity. A well-to-do family in the place means that they will bring custom to Mrs. Honeyman, for instance. Then they will want gardeners, charwomen, and so on. No doubt there will be chances for some of the young girls to enter service with them."

"Yes, sir, I see what you mean. 'Twill be so, there en't any doubt," Luke agreed, with radiant relief.

"It is not only that, Luke. When once a family goes to live in a place, very often other people follow. If Mr. Mannering's friends like Fidding when they come to visit him, they may quite possibly decide to live here, too. This new railway will make the place more convenient, you see."

"'Twill be the line to Sending you mean, sir? James Rideout said he knowed a man as was working on it who said as it was for running the stone down from the quarries."

"That is quite right. But they are going to run passenger trains also. And there is some talk of building a station about a mile and a half from here, to serve this district."

"Is that so, sir? I hadn't heard that, but 'twill be

the better part of three years before the line is working."

"Quite so. But I was looking to the future. Rome was not built in a day, you know."

"I don't suppose 'twas, sir," Luke agreed obligingly. Is it necessary to explain how, a short time afterwards, Luke hitched up his trousers and set off home, calling on the way at "The Gate"? Or to explain how Luke had been thinking about that there house of Mannerings, and had put two and two together to make five to some purpose? For once his opinions had little opposition, for nearly everyone was ready and, indeed, anxious to believe his pleasing inferences.

While Fidding as a whole was thus computing the deferred dividends of its past industry and worth, Bob Garrett actually began to enjoy them. Like a watcher who, after the long night, sees the first glamour of the dawn in the eastern sky, he saw immediately before him a lightening of the burden that for so long had been imposed upon him. Towards the end of the summer. Tom reached the age of fourteen, and, leaving school, obtained, through Bob's intervention, employment as general boy at Bentwood Farm. wages at first were only a few shillings a week, but in a household where every halfpenny was acutely recognized as being of definite value, his contribution to the general income was a considerable help. Liddy, also, was approaching the longed-for age when, released from school, she would be able to devote herself to

the home, with a resultant saving of the small but hardly spared sum which Mrs. Clarke received for the help she gave.

Although it would be some years before Fred was able to set about earning his own living, his grandfather already began to look forward to the time when both the boys would be independent of his help. That Fred might turn to anything other than farm-work was an idea that did not present itself until one day when Mr. Peters, the schoolmaster, in the course of a walk happened to come upon Bob, who was leading his team along the Belhanger Road, on the way to plough up a field of stubble.

- "Ah! you are the very man I wanted to see," Mr. Peters said, when Bob's tall, thin figure came near. "You have heard I am leaving Fidding, I expect?"
- "Yes, that I have, sir, and there en't many youngsters as won't be sorry."
- "Well, I shall be sorry to lose them myself. However, that was not what I wanted to speak about. It was that boy of yours, Fred."
 - "Ah! What has he bin up to?"
- "Oh, it's nothing of that sort. I was wondering what you were thinking of doing with him when he leaves school."
- "Well, sir, I was hoping as I might get'n took on at Bentwood, same as Tom is. He's a queer youngster, in some ways, 'tis true, but I don't see as how he shouldn't settle down a bit when he's older, like, sir."

"I know what you mean, but I should hardly describe him as queer. He is a clever boy, though he doesn't know yet how to use his brains. Training is what he needs."

"That's jest about how I look at it, sir. He will get the training so soon as he starts working."

"Yes, yes, of course he would. But that is not quite what I meant." The schoolmaster hesitated for a moment. "What I should like would be to see Fred carry on his school-days a little further. I was wondering what you would think of his taking up evening classes when he leaves school. They have a first-rate course in Pricehurst now, and it would only mean his going over about twice a week. I am sure he would thank you afterwards, if you made him."

"Well, sir, I don't hold with too much schooling myself. I didn't get much when I was a boy. There was no schools like there is now, not when I was a youngster, and I can't say I have missed them much."

"No, I don't suppose you have. Your work can't be learned at school ——"

"'Tis what I am always saying, sir. I don't see the use of it."

"Quite so. But my idea was for Fred to go in for something—different, let us say, different from farm work. If he once got a start, I believe he would do well. He might perhaps win a scholarship, that is to say he would do well enough for the authorities to pay

for finishing his education. I am quite sure he shows a lot of promise, only it's undisciplined."

"Well, I am sure 'tis very good of you to take so much interest in the lad, sir. But I don't agree with you, that I don't, and 'tis no use bobbing round it. My folk have always bin farm folk, and I don't see why Fred should be any different. 'Tis a good life, though 'tis hard. Taking one thing with another, I wouldn't ask for nothing different, not if I had the chance. There is too much of this idea of sending the youngsters to Pricehurst, to my mind, and I never knowed no real good to come of it. If Fred can get took on at Bentwood, he will be lucky, and he didn't ought to seek anything different."

"Of course, if that is how you look at it, I don't see what else I can say," said Mr. Peters doubtfully. "I haven't spoken to Fred himself, as I didn't want to make him unsettled if nothing came of the idea. You are determined not to let him go to the evening classes, then?"

"I don't know about determined, sir, but he won't go if I can stop him."

A few minutes later, the schoolmaster parted from Bob, feeling discouraged and slightly nettled. He was, in reality, a diffident man, and felt disinclined to make any further effort to overcome the traditional conservatism of the villager. He believed that Fred, if encouraged, might do well, but, after all, it was for Fred to work out his own salvation. The schoolmaster

had done his duty, even might be considered as having exceeded it in those days, and his personal interest in Fred was overshadowed by the fact that before long the schoolmaster himself would be leaving the place. For a moment he hesitated, feeling that the boy's destiny possibly rested in his hands, but the hesitation was only momentary, became obscured and confused by a throng of doubts as to his fitness and authority to order another's life in this uncertain world. He walked on, dismissing the subject from his mind.

X

In the following spring, the rooks in the churchyard elms, those sanguine busybodies who posed so ingenuously as morose and phlegmatic critics of the village life, eyed with intense curiosity the behavior of Bob Garrett each evening in his garden. To their mind it was quite incomprehensible that a man who previously had devoted himself so unreservedly to digging and manuring uninteresting vegetables, should suddenly turn his attention to far more interesting things. Could it be a sign of grace? Had he at last realized that his audience expected to be entertained in the intervals of frenzied and ineffective nest-building?

As a matter of fact, Bob Garrett's behavior was an expression of emancipation. The long years of intense

SHEPHERD'S WARNING

74

effort were ending, and his mind was turning to the graces of life that for so long he had been forced to neglect. The little border of flowers always had been there, but the figures of curious fowls that his shears were clipping in the old hedge, the row of straw beehives, the window-boxes and the wooden figure of a grenadier impelled by a windmill to salute with furious rapidity, these were expressions of the new optimism that was beginning to enhearten him. For him, as for others, the scene was set for prosperity. But the prosperity he recognized and sought lay at his thresh-Others turned their eyes to Pricehurst, began to formulate plans to send sons and daughters to delve in the unfathomable richness of the town, or turned their eyes to the hillside, where the Mannerings' house stood like a beneficent beacon. But Bob and a handful of his contemporaries were seizin of the soil to which they and their forbears through untold generations had been dedicated. The prosperity they sought was not the fruit of human endeavor but largess of mutable winds and dower of sun.

SECOND PART (1901)

T

EARLY one Sunday afternoon in August, Bob Garrett walked down the track from Bentwood Farm towards Fidding. It was in the height of the harvest, and, although the general work had been suspended that day, Bob had volunteered to water the horses at the farm for Rideout, who had gone to Pricehurst to see a sister of his who was ill. Harvest, the most profitable time in the year, was also the most exhausting, and Bob was looking forward to the cup of tea that he knew Liddy would have ready for him when Eight years had not aged him he reached home. greatly. His tall, sinewy figure, the shadow of which the level rays of the sinking sun threw far before him. was still full of measured strength, his eyes were clear and unfaltering, and his cheeks, now burning with a dull red superimposed upon deep tan, firm and hale. He was still scarcely conscious of aging, and in that warm sun, when the reminder of his only serious handicap, rheumatism, was absent, he felt that his fatigue was merely the natural result of the unremitting labor of harvesting, a fatigue that had affected him no less in earlier years. When he reached home, he flung

down his coat, and, wiping the sweat from his forehead with the back of his hand, dropped into a chair with a grunt of satisfaction.

"Where's Tom and Fred?" he asked.

"They have both gone out," Liddy answered.
"Tom went off quite early, and Fred so soon as he come back from old Luke's."

"They are always going out, sim's to me," her grand-father said in a tone of disapproval. "Ten't bin so bad this last week. They en't had the time, with the harvesting. But you know as well as I do they don't hardly get home, most days, afore they must be going off to Pricehurst. I don't like it. 'Tis my belief they are up to no good. 'Tis they pubs, 'pend upon it, that's how 'tis. They know well enough as I en't going to say naught to them having a glass or two, same as everybody else. 'Ten't enough for them. They must be over to Pricehurst along of all they betting chaps."

"I don't think that is how 'tis, dad," Liddy protested. "Tom went off quite early. 'Twould be no use he going to the pubs before they open."

"'Ten't no good telling me you don't think. I know 'tis what I say. I en't a babby. They young chaps is all the same nowadays. If 'ten't one thing, 'tis another. They don't heed me no more than I was the cat. You remember how 'twas before that young Sally Dean left Bentwood? Dairymaid she called herself. She weren't no more a dairymaid than yourself. So

long as she could get Tom or Fred to go and look at her, she didn't care how 'twas with nothing else. Why the two of them should have bin so set on her, beats me. You'd have thought there was plenty of other gals for them. I knowed how 'twould be. She had roving blood in her, and 'ten't a thing you can thwart. 'Twas wonderful fortunate she went off as she did. All these young chaps is the same; must be hanging round the pubs, or hankering after the gals. 'Tis as well your George is one of the old-fashioned sort. You might have done a deal worse."

Liddy, thoughtfully watching the kettle, made no answer. In spite of her homely outlook on life, she was not unperceptive, and while her brothers had shown signs of restiveness under their grandfather's increasing tendency to grumble, she made allowances which were none the less generous because their object, had he known of them, would have been both annoyed and hurt. Whatever her grandfather himself believed, Liddy knew very well that he was getting an old man, knew that in many little ways, as yet unperceived by him, he was failing to attain the high standard of excellent achievement that once had been so inevitable and unconscious with him. At present, these failures, even when realized, were attributed to extraneous influences; perhaps the weather had made the soil unduly heavy; perhaps the rheumatism from which he suffered so severely had for the time affected his physical accuracy. There was always some

specious explanation that was convincing to Bob him-But Liddy was neither convinced nor even momentarily deluded. She saw that, in reality, the perfect achievements had become exceptional, that what her grandfather believed to be exceptions, his failures. were already the rule. What was more, she knew that, apart from these unconscious—but none the less pathetic-shortcomings, her grandfather suffered consciously from another thing. He realized, and, behind defensive aggressions, was succumbing to the realization, that the tide of circumstance had set against him. The town long since had invested Fidding, and, finding it defenseless, had begun to take possession, revolutionizing both its life and its ideas. Bob Garrett, for so long self-reliant and fortified against fate by the consciousness of holding an integral and valuable position in the economy of the place, had become merely one of a band of hostages, practising their honorable arts before alien eyes to which those arts seemed contemptible. But Liddy, who realized these things, and chafed against them with an impatience bred of her own conservative outlook, refrained so far as she was able from encouraging her grandfather to dwell on them. Already the small amount that he had perceived was undermining a courage and fortitude that age itself was sapping. She felt that a complete realization of the doom that already was sealed would probably embitter and dishearten him past recovery.

So Liddy said nothing, but stood watching the

kettle singing on the little fire, with her eyebrows raised slightly in rather wistful contemplation.

"George coming for you?" her grandfather asked, after a short pause, which he filled in loading his pipe.

"He said he might look round to see if I felt like a bit of air," Liddy answered.

In reality, behind her superficial thoughts, she was listening even then for the sound of the garden gate opening. But she surrounded her courtship, sincere and absorbing as it was, with assumptions of indefiniteness and nonchalance, and these were so inherent a part of the ceremonial attending such matters that she would have considered any other attitude an exhibition of immodesty. If she were asked whether she was going to marry George Vines, Liddy would have answered, "I might be," up to the very last moment Had anyone been sufficiently of final commission. peculiar to ask her whether she loved him, her face would have flamed as at an outrage. Yet she was ready to accept, did, in fact, accept as perfectly inoffensive, badinage that was often sufficiently broad to try more sophisticated brides than herself. such badinage was allowable and itself an indispensable part of the courtship ceremonial. Everything, in fact, was allowable except sincerity.

But Liddy's assumption of indifference was transparently an assumption. Her heart was impulsive and affectionate. And when she had satisfied her conscience by answering her grandfather's question with offhand uncertainty, she felt justified in deserting the kettle and standing at the door, so that she might see her lover the sooner. Even had she remained before the fire, a reluctant sentinel, her face would have betraved the fact that the arrival of this man, whom she saw every day, was a tumultuous event. And anyone who saw her at the cottage door, with her heightened color and shining eyes, might have envied George The awkward age had passed, the early deterioration in a country girl's looks had not set in; Liddy, who would never have dreamed of cheapening herself by getting ready for the expected walk until formally invited to go, was still unspoiled by a best hat. Her Sunday dress alone, for all its bravery, was unable to destroy the charm of her unpampered figure and simple face.

Bob Garrett, sitting smoking in his chair, heard before long the murmur of voices at the door, and a moment later Liddy entered the kitchen, followed by George Vines, who, although nearly twelve years her senior, was in Bob's opinion far the most suitable man she could have chosen in Fidding.

- "Nice evening, George," Bob said.
- "Ah!" George agreed, looking red, and embarrassed by consciousness of an artificial formality.
- "George was asking if I would care to take a turn with him," Liddy explained. "But I don't hardly like to leave you alone, seeing as the boys is out."

"It won't make no difference to me, Liddy," her grandfather answered. "I shall do a bit in my old garden, after I have had my tea. You go along; 'twill do you good."

"Well, I will just get your tea, dad," Liddy said, gracefully yielding to graceful persuasion. "Then I will run and put on my hat."

The painful dumbness of George Vines, and his distressed face while these preliminaries were being carried out, might have persuaded a stranger that he had swallowed his tongue.

II

Left alone, Bob was content to sit for a time drinking his tea, and musing in a desultory way about his garden and his work. But he had no intention of remaining idle for long while there was sufficient light to work. Apart from his instinctive fear of wasting time, he did not look upon work as needing to be balanced by relaxation. He had no relaxations, nor did he feel their absence. In a way, almost everything he did was a relaxation; the pages over which he pored were not those of a ledger, immaculate and characterless, but those of nature. Even when he was crossploughing a large field, the skill of long practice making the work almost mechanical, the monotony of the operation was delusive, for there were innumerable

details of weather, soil, and of the implement he used that were alive with interest to one whose life was centred on such things. And fatigue, unless of exceptional severity, would not deter him from working in his garden when he reached home. Strength, skilfully husbanded, will outlast the hours of daylight, and he had learned to husband his strength, by working slowly, and by approaching his work in the best way, handling spade or hoe or "prong" in such a manner as to get the utmost advantage from the balance or temper that gave the particular implement he used its individuality.

Bob Garrett would have worked from dawn to night-fall every day in every year with no feeling except thankfulness at being so fully employed. After all, when he was not at work, what was there for him to do, except go to bed? The inn provided a means of amusement, it is true; but the men he respected, whom only he would care to meet, would be themselves too busy to sit idly drinking, while light and weather held. During the childhood of his grandchildren the inn was closed to him by lack of means, and when that obstacle was removed he found that the custom of the inn had changed, that, for every friend, he met half a dozen who were comparative strangers; and he was not comfortable in the presence of any but his familiars

Instead of going elsewhere, he would be glad enough to go into his garden when he had finished his tea. He would work there in a leisurely way for perhaps an hour, or an hour and a half, and then, when Liddy and the boys returned and supper was finished, there on the table lay the copy of Reynolds' Weekly, from which Liddy would read aloud such things as interested him-some of the criminal news, the articles on poultry-keeping and gardening (with which he seldom agreed), the advertisements for missing relatives ("There were a chap I knowed of that name as used to work for old So-and-so, when I was a youngster"), and casually selected items of general news. He enjoyed the Sunday newspaper, as administered by Liddy, who secretly read the more scandalous passages with absorbed but innocent interest. That he was not much of a hand at print Bob readily admitted. At a pinch he could spell out simple words. But what use had he for books, which, as his father often had told him, merely tortured the eyes that were better used for other purposes? He found direct observation more satisfactory than transmitted intelligence. Had he wasted his time reading a pack of nonsense he would have learned nothing. So he would have argued, and to this extent rightly, that he would never have acquired his intimate and personal knowledge of the things with which he was familiar. He might have obtained an abstract acquaintance with persons real and fictitious, but he would not have called cows "old lady" with a lively knowledge of all their individual faults and weaknesses: nor would he have

84 SHEPHERD'S WARNING

looked with an eye so friendly and initiate upon all the animate and inanimate details that surrounded his life.

Having finished his tea. Bob looked at his small store of tobacco, and, deciding that he must not yield to the temptation to smoke another pipe, picked up his fork and went to turn up the soil in the garden. It was pleasant there on that tranquil evening, with long shadows splashed across the ground, and, above the hill crest, the colored reaches of the sky fading impalpably in exquisite delicacies of tone. Even the rooks seemed to be affected by the tranquillizing influences that were abroad. Their infrequent caws sounded less harsh than usual, as if, there in the treetops, in their black cassocks, with the sincere devotion of sinners, they were holding vespers of their own, inaudibly, except when clerk and congregation joined in an unctuous "Amen." With the rooks eyeing him over imaginary psalters, Bob worked with leisurely satisfaction until the two bells in the church tower began their placid see-sawing chimes and called from here and there unhurrying tributaries of worshippers. among whom was Mrs. Clarke, who emerged from her cottage in her best bonnet and shawl. Upon her arm she wore, as one wears a jeweled pendant, her umbrella: in her hand she carried her Prayer Book, in the old-fashioned way folded in a clean handkerchief and made fragrant with a spray of southernwood.

"Beautiful evening, Mr. Garrett," she said, as Bob straightened himself at her approach.

- "So 'tis," he answered with appreciative emphasis.
- "Sims you won't be going to church?"
- "No; 'tis the first moment I bin able so much as to look to my little plot for I dunno how long."
- "Ah! There is wonderful little time to do anything during harvest. It do look as if 'twas settled for a nice fine spell; reg'lar lucky we bin this year in that way."
- "So we have, Mrs. Clarke. We shall get'n in nicely now, or did ought to. It has bin a rare year for the corn, same as 'twas for the hay. There en't above a few patches laid in the hull valley. My old fag-hook, he en't hardly wanted. Feels reg'lar out in the cold he do!"
- "I dare say he do!" Mrs. Clarke agreed, smiling. "You will have heard the news, I suppose?"
- "I can't say I have, unless 'tis about that poor chap as was sunstrook Breede way."
- "Oh, no, 'ten't that. Sims Mr. Tewson has made up hes mind to go to Canady, after all."
- "Oh, dear! You never mean to say that, now! Well, I'm surprised at'n. 'Course, I knows hes boy's bin asking him to goo, now the old lady's dead. But he ought to have more sense at his time of life. Why, he must be pushing seventy. What does he think he's going to do out in them parts, I would like to know! He ought to have more sense. I wouldn't hardly have believed as he could have bin so foolish. . . . Well, that is another of them. There won't be none of us

left soon, I s'pose. Those as don't die, leaves. Why, 'tain't hardly Fidding no longer. What will happen when us old chaps go, I don't like to think. There en't hardly one of these youngsters knows anything. They call themselves ploughmen, horsemen, and the rest of it. Ploughmen! Why, 'ten't so long since a chap as knowed twice as much as the best of the youngsters would have been sent packing pretty smart. No farmer would have looked at'n. I do believe that. without you count old Luke Medlar, Dicky and myself, there en't a chap within five miles as can thatch a rick-thatch I mean, not tease it with a thatchingcomb and a wimble. All the likely youngsters is off to Pricehurst. There en't any left scarcely, 'cept those as is weak-minded, and there's none come but what is no use to nobody. They en't got heart in their work."

"Ah! 'tis a sad way everything is in, to be sure," Mrs. Clarke agreed, with an eye on the church. "Still, I mustn't be talking here; there be the vicar crossing his garden, and it makes me all of a pummy to go in late."

When his neighbor had hurried off, Bob remained for a time with one foot on his fork, staring rather disconsolately at the village. Gradual as the change had been, it had never escaped him. In such moments, when his mind had been dwelling in the past, he realized the change with acute bitterness. The end of Fidding in which his cottage stood remained little

altered, but from his garden could be seen the slate roofs of the little red-brick villas that had invaded the village from the East, spreading gradually from the railway station—Fidding Road—a mile and a half away. And behind him, along the slope of the hill, like ominous outposts, were scattered the houses of wealthy people, houses that looked large and efficient, with their terraced gardens and conspicuous hothouses. The Mannerings' house, "Hillside," once the object of such eager optimism, had become merely one of a dozen similar houses, in the gardens of which the click of croquet-mallets and the thud of tennisballs sounded above the subdued ground-bass of the church organ.

If the vicar had been confronted with the prophecy he made when the first scaffold poles stood on the hill-side, he would have probably claimed that it had been fulfilled. Fidding, as a whole, was more prosperous than in earlier years, but Fidding, losing its individuality, had become almost a suburb of Pricehurst. Even when a distinction was made between the old village and its garish and overwhelming parasite, it could not be denied that the vicar would have had a strong case. Among the younger families occupying the cottages were many which had prospered in pocket. There were young women who, as charwomen, earned more in a week than their mothers, as field workers, earned in a month. There were girls who, in "little places" among the villas, lived more hygienically and

less laboriously than ever did their parents. There were also a few men like Luke Medlar who prospered as jobbing gardeners. It was, in fact, only men and women like Bob Garrett and Mrs. Clarke who had falsified the prophecy. But, in a wider interpretation, if the general well-being of the community were considered, the vicar would have had less cause for self-Bob Garrett's distrust and antipathy satisfaction. were perhaps partly the result of short-sighted conservatism, but they were the result also of an unformulated, scarcely comprehended feeling that, could he have construed it, would have been entitled to respect. Inarticulate, there lay in his mind the knowledge that the younger generation which passed him with selfsatisfied arrogance had changed unpretentious copper and silver for meretricious gold of doubtful worth. They had, in fact, jettisoned their heritage. Farthing's boy, for instance, was employed by a draper in Pricehurst. He dressed in imitation of a clerk. aspired to the splendid life of a shop-walker, smoked cigarettes, and despised his father. He was well satisfied with himself and with his life. Yet, when all was said, was his satisfaction as substantial as that of his apparently uncouth father, who, beneath superficial grumbles, cherished the honest pride of a skilled and resourceful man, by whom scarcely an acre in the valley could be seen without a memory of some bit of work well and truly done by himself?

Even if Bob Garrett had been conscious of the

strength of his case, he could scarcely have failed to feel disheartened. As it was, he had nothing to support him, beyond an obstinate refusal to yield to the new order. So, when his survey of the village that evening made him feel depressed, he went off for a chat with Luke Medlar, confident that the latter would be sympathetically despondent. But when he reached Luke's door, he was received with an item of news that, superimposed upon that of Mrs. Clarke, was more than depressing.

"The Reverend told me something, not above an hour since," Luke announced, adding, after an impressive pause, "That chap as was after Mrs. Honeyman's little house has got'n."

If Bob had belonged to a higher grade in society he would have sworn, ineffectually. As it was, he responded to the news in a different way.

" I knew how 'twould be."

The words and the tone of resignation in which they were spoken represented not a broken spirit, but an inbred fatalism, born of immemorial submission to the fact that the "upper classes" had a prescriptive power to do what they pleased.

"They are turning the poor old gal out, neck and crop," Luke continued with fierce relish, as if drawing morose satisfaction from the sacrifice wrung by the irresistible from the powerless.

- "But she've nowhere to go!" Bob protested.
- "Oh, yes, she have," Luke answered in an excited

falsetto. "There's the Union, en't there? That is where she will go, so soon as she have run through what they give her for the loss of her trade. 'Ten't likely to be a fortune! Sims her little place looks so nice that 'twas a shame she should keep it, when this here So-and-so wanted it."

"Oh, dear! I'm sorry to hear it," Bob murmured, his old voice soft and compassionate. "She never did no harm to nobody, and now—out she goes. 'Tis always the same."

III

Liddy, walking slowly home with George Vines along the ridge of the hills, identified her father far away in the valley, standing at the gate of Luke Medlar's garden. She could not mistake his tall, thin figure, his round felt hat, black jacket and snowy trousers, and the sight of it reminded her of the conversation that had taken place that afternoon.

"Dad was on again about the boys being over to Pricehurst so often," she said, partly because George was her confidant in most things, partly because she had an instinctive hope that he might be able to dissipate forebodings that for some time past had been repelled from her mind only by a conscious effort. "He keeps saying he is sure 'tis the pubs they go for, betting and that. And he feels real hurt about it.

He don't hardly see them except when they has their suppers. You don't think that is how 'tis, do you, George? I don't feel altogether easy in my mind, and that is a fact. Somehow, though, I don't feel 'tis the pubs they are after."

"Of course your dad en't hardly used to it," George answered evasively. "Folk never went to Pricehurst a wonderful lot, not in his time; 'cept of a Saturday or when 'twas market day. And now 'tis all the other way. 'Ten't Tom or Fred as is the only ones that goes. There is a lot of them do; not that I do myself, as you know. I haven't a cant that way, nor never had. But a lot of these young chaps must be off somewheres. Fidding en't good enough for they. 'Tis the lights, and the folk in Pricehurst as they go after. Not that they mayern't perhaps have a glass now and again, and maybe give a wink to the gals. But mostly they sims just to stand about, looking proper soft."

Liddy was aware that there was truth in what George said, but he was not good at dissimulation, and something in his tone made her look at him searchingly.

"Are you sure that is all there is in it, George?" she asked. "I'm that anxious about them, I feel miserable at times. You wouldn't go for to mislead me, dear, would you? If there be anything, no matter what 'tis, I would like to be told. Dad don't think of nothing but the pubs, but I can't help feeling 'tis some girls they is after. And if 'tis that, there must

be something wrong, or why shouldn't they tell us?"

"Well, I dessay you are right," George admitted, after some hesitation. "P'r'aps 'twould be as well for you to know, though I didn't hardly like to mention it before. 'Tweren't no business of mine, you see. Do you remember Sally Dean?"

Liddy stopped suddenly, in astonished consternation.

- "Whatever do you mean, George?"
- "Don't take on, dear, 'ten't nothing much. Well, the fact is as Sally Dean is over to Pricehurst. She is at the 'Cricketers' Arms,' washing-up, like. She's not in the bar, you follow."
 - "You don't mean as 'tis she they are after?"
- "That is how 'tis. I can't say exactly what is the rights of it. But that's how 'tis."
- "But are they both after the same gal, George? It don't sim hardly right somehow, they being brothers."
- "Well, be how 'twill, they are, so I've heard. They do say as Sally ben't no better nor what she might be, though very likely 'tis naught but talk. Folk in Fidding is that set against her, you see."
- "Oh, dear! whatever shall I do?" Liddy exclaimed. "Both of'n after the same gal, and she the last as dad would hear on. Oh, but he'll be mad about it. And I en't surprised. I did used to be sorry for Sally, but the way she carried on at Bentwood—dad, of course,

don't only look at that. 'Tis her mother, and her father being hanged, as he thinks on. He's proud is dad, and when once he have made up his mind he won't yield, not for nothing. Oh, dear! I do hope 'twill be all right. I never did take to Sally; not but what I was sorry for her, until she carried on so. And she treated Mrs. Clarke real bad, running off without so much as a by-your-leave. Do you think I ought to tell dad, George? I don't hardly know what will be for the best."

"I have heard they say as 'tis no use doing aught in a matter of this sort," George answered profoundly. "'Tis more like to do harm nor good."

"I dessay you are right," Liddy agreed, doubtfully.
"Tis a real comfort having you to talk about it with," she added, with a warm gratitude that resulted in George's arm being put round her waist, and the conversation coming to an end for a time.

But when they neared home, they saw a figure walking quickly along the path from Pricehurst to the village. It reached the edge of the hills and passed from sight.

- "Did you see who that was?" Liddy asked.
- "Ah! Tom, weren't it?"
- "So 'twere. Now, what has he bin doing, I wonder, to come home so early?"
- "P'raps Fred has cut'n out. 'Tain't likely as Sally would want them both at once. 'Twould be uncomfortable-like," George suggested flippantly.

"I dessay that is how it be," Liddy agreed seriously.
"Why ever did she come back to Pricehurst? I thought she was gone for good."

"Her sort roves, but they always comes back. I don't know why 'tis, but 'tis so."

IV

Liddy had more reason for consternation than for surprise on hearing of the influence that Sally Dean was exercising over her brothers. So far as Sally was concerned, they had not plunged into the depths of passion, but, after essaying its waters with tentative feet, had gradually waded in, scarcely realizing the progress they were making. When Sally Dean herself looked back across the eighteen years of her life, indeed, it was hard for her to discern the time when Tom and Fred Garrett had not shared it. The early days when she lived with her parents had faded into obscurity. She could remember them, but the memory was inchoate, lacked all intimate associations. years she had spent in Mrs. Clarke's cottage, however, stood out in clearer definition, and even in those years the two boys had played a part. Even then, resentful at her destiny, and quick to perceive the suspicion, almost aversion, with which she was generally regarded, she was aware that the Garrett children treated her almost as if she were normal. Building upon insecure ground, in fact, she had welcomed as exceptional their furtive overtures, not realizing that any other children in the village, had they been her neighbors, would have acted in the same way. She was so well accustomed to peculiarities in the behavior of others towards her that it did not seem strange for Tom, Fred and Liddy to associate with her, across the low privet hedge that separated their gardens, only in the absence of Bob Garrett. And the latter himself, with a certain blunt justice, realizing that Sally could not be judged solely by the behavior of her parents, had concealed the prejudice he felt, given her now a nod, now a dole of kindly words, small civilities that were extravagantly embroidered upon, if never abused.

This feeling of affinity between herself and the Garrett children had been strengthened when Sally, with the help of Mrs. Clarke, obtained a situation as dairymaid at Bentwood Farm, when she was nearly seventeen years old. Just as when she was at the village school the other children almost without exception had arrayed themselves against her, so when she was at Bentwood Farm the other girls, readily influenced by the public opinion that branded her as illomened, made it clear that they considered her a pariah, less brutally perhaps but not less definitely than had the school children. And Sally, brooding and resentful, came to regard the Garrett children, who still associated with her, as the only human beings possessing any humanity.

At that time, Sally, who, like most country girls, matured rapidly, began to perceive that the destiny which had given her an inheritance so heavy to endure. at the same time had dowered her with the ability to revenge herself upon those who affected to despise her. At first the realization was not conscious, for, although unusually introspective for a girl of her class, Sally was forced to work too hard to enjoy the indolence that breeds self-analysis. But even hard work could not suppress primitive inclinations, and she began to discover that, whereas the young men with whom she was brought into contact shook indubitably if ineffectually the citadel of her emotions, her own presence had upon them an effect of extraordinary potency, as if the fierce and inarticulate yearnings that smouldered in her heart, themselves unquickened, reacted upon others, causing fierce, ungovernable conflagrations. Before long the aversion with which she was regarded by the other girls became hate, hot and relentless, as first one and then another discovered that she was repaying slights with estrangements, turning constant young men into infatuated admirers of her own. But while Sally thus became a centre of irritation at the farm, she had at first no conscious policy of revenge, did not even go out of her way to engage attention: but when attention came, sooner or later she realized its possibilities, and, having done so, did not hesitate to develop them. At that time she was passionately fond of horses, and if one of the horsemen or carters sheepishly offered her a not very exhilarating ride on a cart-horse, she did not hesitate to accept. having nothing better to expect. Clambering on to the horse's back with the aid of the carter, and sitting astride, her skirts being left to make the best of it, she would set off, at first with no thought beyond the pleasure of the moment. But before long she would realize that this same carter, who of late had been making sheep's eyes at her, was walking out with one of the other girls. That girl, it may be taken for granted, had been frankly hostile to Sally, and the latter, remembering this, could hardly have been expected to refrain from grasping the revenge so temptingly proffered. Without feeling any particular interest in the carter himself, she would, in a retaliatory spirit, exploit her hold upon him until her vindictive impulse was spent, by which time, so far as the other girl was concerned, the mischief would be irrevocable.

It was Sally's misfortune that she was quite incapable of refraining from accentuating the personal peculiarities that would have alienated her from her companions even if her parents had been normal. With conscious perversity, which was at times intentional, she assiduously sacrificed herself on the altar of her misfortunes, making herself increasingly disliked by quite unnecessary immolations. When she first went to the farm her passion for personal cleanliness had been spontaneous, but, in the face of the distrust with which it was regarded, it became exag-

gerated into a manifesto. Herself no moral paragon. her actions influenced by self-respect alone, she made capital out of the loose, but only superficially loose, conversation of the other girls, who, indeed, were by temperament more chaste than herself. Not only did she act thus as a hygienic and moral arbiter, but also maliciously emphasized her own physical superiorities, as if they were meritorious. Her profuse black hair, the delicacy and fineness of her body in texture and modeling, and her mental facility, instead of being tactfully minimized, were accentuated and obtruded in a dozen ways every day. But, in spite of these unattractive qualities, Sally at heart was not altogether unattractive. She had surrounded herself with a defensive barrier constructed of the best material she could procure, but the necessity for such a barrier was not of her own choosing. She was burdened not only by the superficial misfortune of her parentage, but also by her own fierce heart, which had never known, never would know, any discipline but that of experience.

During those days at the farm, Fred and Tom were the only men with whom Sally felt at ease. And Sally, at first regarding them merely as friendly souls in a hostile land, found that, as the months passed, she not only attracted the two boys, but was herself attracted. She was, indeed, stimulated by the delicate, if unperceived, contrast in her attitude towards them. Her attitude was like that of one climbing a steep

ascent, who has one hand held by a firm-footed companion, and reaches out the other to one who is even less stable than herself. Tom, arrogant and stupid, asked only for submission; Fred, with a more complex personality, needed support.

Sally's relations with the farmer and his wife were as discordant as her relations with her companions. She was not idle, but she was careless. She did not intentionally disregard instructions, but she forgot It was obvious, also, that she disturbed the whole community. Her influence stalked everywhere. leaving untouched only the elderly men. There were limits, indeed, to the compassion that had induced the farmer to employ her. And, just after her seventeenth birthday, those limits were passed. There was a fair in Sending, and Sally, with characteristic lack of forethought, induced Tom Garrett to take her to it. They went one evening without declaring their intention, for fear of opposition, and Sally spent two hours of undisciplined enjoyment on the roundabouts, staring at the side-shows, and yielding her emotions to the crude appeals that were made to them on every side. She returned, still exhilarated and hectic, to a stormy scene at the farm, retiring to bed in disgrace. She did, as a matter of fact, actually go to bed, but when the other girls in her room were asleep, and snoring with hearty abandon, she dressed and set out with a pilgrim basket containing her clothes, a purse containing twenty-two shillings (her squirrel's hoard), and a

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heart swollen with stupendous resolutions. She carried also, testimonials to a practical mind, a packet of bread, cake, bacon and cheese, cheerfully thieved from the larder.

V

Sally vanished from Fidding, leaving nothing behind her except a profusion of hostile opinions. But about a year later, Tom Garrett, when delivering a load of beans at a factor's in Pricehurst, discovered by chance that the exile was employed as scullery-maid at the "Cricketers' Arms," a seedy hostelry in the street that was his destination. Tom, then twenty-two years old, had grown more assertive during that year, and it was not long before he was making violent love to Sally, while, on her side, she was encouraging him to do so, more because she found his ardor exciting than because she reciprocated it. One day, in an ill-omened moment, Tom, unable to keep an appointment he had made with Sally, persuaded Fred to let her know. Fred was an ill-chosen ambassador. No sooner did Sally see him than the glamour that had always been his returned. The kisses of former days seemed still warm on her lips, as if he and she had parted only a few hours since, during which hours Fred had become transfigured from a creature of untutored limbs into a too-attractive being with diffident eyes. The diffidence that appeared in his eyes pervaded Fred's entire character, making him seem wayward and elusive, unlike anyone else Sally had ever known. She became infatuated, then and there; practically demanded an affection that, indeed, was offered spontaneously. Fred became not only his brother's rival, but also, it would have seemed, his triumphant rival. Yet Sally's impulsive affections even then did not become stable. Tom, when he was present, still swayed her, even if, when he left her, the thought of Fred recaptured her heart.

It was not long before Tom discovered what had happened, but neither he nor Fred made any open allusion to the barrier that had fallen between them. In spite of the rather contemptuous attitude he assumed towards his still fanciful and erratic brother. Tom was afraid of him. He knew that the issues of open warfare between them were uncertain, and, therefore, hugged an apparent neutrality beneath the cover of which he hoped to deal a decisive blow. Fred himself, as Tom knew, was unlikely to declare war, being naturally secretive—an attribute springing from his diffidence—and reciprocating, moreover, Tom's fear of himself. His diffidence blinded him to his own strength, throwing into relief his brother's weapons, public ridicule and loud assertion, which were none the less devastating because they were crude.

For a time they drifted on, each haunting the movements of the other, until that afternoon, when Liddy learned the position, Tom, knowing that his brother had promised to help Luke Medlar in his garden, walked over to Pricehurst early in the afternoon in order to secure Sally before Fred could arrive. But the enterprise failed. When Tom asked for Sally at the back door of the public-house, he was told that she was out, and would not return till late in the evening. That being so, there was nothing for Tom to do except nurse imaginary grievances and wile away the time until he could enhearten himself by some beer before returning home.

VI

When Tom did reach home, feeling exasperated and quarrelsome, his grandfather was sitting in the cottage doorway, smoking his short clay pipe.

- "Oh, you have come back, have you?" the old man said sarcastically.
- "Can't you see? You en't blind yet, are you?"
 Tom answered with a surly air.
- "Don't you think you can give me back-answers, Tom," Bob retorted angrily. "Putting lard on your hair don't make a man of you. Why, when I was your age, I was a match for two of your size."
 - "Ah! You would be."
- "Yes, and I'll show you, if you don't mind! Where is your brother?"
 - "How should I know? He ain't here, anyway."

- "You may reckon on that! You're a pair, you are. "Ten't likely you'll be in your home if you can be out of it."
- "Where is Liddy?" Tom asked, with a feeling of extreme subtlety.
 - "She en't home yet."
- "No, 'pend upon it, she ain't. She never be, not if she can get away to that tatie-faced George of hers. You ask often enough about we, but sims Liddy can do as she lists. She is always right, Liddy is."
- "None of that, Tom. 'Ten't the same, and you knows it. It will be a different pair of shoes when you go courting, and I will not be complaining then."
- "Ah, I lay you won't!" Tom said, with deep sarcasm.
- "Well, here is Liddy: coming to give us our supper. She don't keep you waiting long. You en't got much call to complain."

A moment later Liddy opened the garden gate and joined them.

- "I see you come back, not a great while since, Tom, so I thought I had best be getting home myself," she said.
- "What do you want to get spying after me for?" Tom asked angrily.
- "Liddy en't one to spy," his grandfather retorted severely. "What makes you say such a thing? Sims to me 'tis only them as has something to be ashamed of as gets such notions."

"I was only coming over from Pricehurst," Tom answered sulkily.

The conversation had become too intricate for him, and he had lost sight of its origin.

"Ah, Pricehurst! Of course! Why en't you content to bide here?"

"Because I en't. 'Tis a mucky little place, and I want something better nor to live here all my life. I am fit for something better nor working for Mason all my life, I reckon."

During Tom's outburst his grandfather had become rigid with emotion.

"Fit for something better!" he exclaimed incredulously. "Who do you take yourself for? Not good enough: so that is how 'tis! Why, you are scarce fit to rake muck. Can you rip? Can you mow?—or thatch, or sow, or clear a ditch? Why, there is scarce a thing you can make a showing at. You learn your job, afore you think you are too good for it."

"Come in, dad, do!" Liddy pleaded, soothingly.
"Tis ever so late. We will never get supper done, else."

Yielding, the old man followed her, leaving Tom staring with feelings far from æsthetic at the great disk of the harvest moon which, beckoned by limpid stars, was rising above the sombre shadow of the hills.

VII

Beyond those hills, over in the vale of Pricehurst, the corn-stooks stood palely golden beneath the moon, their shapes still retaining a touch of warmer radiance from the daylight that overhead faded into unfathomable reaches, passed from translucence to rich opacity, an amethyst pall pierced by the stars, the earliest emissaries of which were already fitfully appearing. The enveloping night was hushed. Along the valley. field after fading field lay in tranquil loveliness, mellowed and enhanced by indescribable half-tones of color, the outlines of shadowy hedges becoming softer, losing all but faint, impalpable definition, until vision failed in fluid twilight. But, attuned to this visible orchestra, from coppice and more distant coppice, the songs of nightingales no longer streamed cascading loud and sweet in the rich air. Spring's visitant had passed, leaving only the night-jar to startle with strange rhythm the silences of lonely woods.

From the fringe of the long wood that crowned the hills bordering the valley, Sally and Fred emerged, having walked out from Pricehurst in the close air of early evening. For a moment they stood surveying the glimmering landscape that lay beneath them, fading into the veils of night.

"The moon is getting brighter now she is well up," Fred said.

106

"It looked that big and near when it first rose that I felt almost frightened," Sally answered, smiling. "It seemed almost like a threat. I wonder why the harvest moon do look so big."

"I can't say why 'tis. But with things so well forward, and the weather set as 'tis, we aren't likely to have to use her as a lamp to work by this year. Dad says as when he was a boy, and the weather simmed like to break at harvesting, they would often work at night, or maybe knock off for a few hours, and start off again after midnight. But these machines have mostly put a stop to that sort of thing; they do the job in less'n half the time as was took when 'twas all done by hand."

"Yes, I have heard that's why 'tis called the harvest moon. 'Tis bright enough, like daylight as they say."

"'Tis bright enough, but not like daylight. You have only got to look at they stooks to think there was a candle in the sky. 'Tis candlelight it's like, to my mind."

For a time they stood in silence, and then Fred spoke again meditatively:

"'Tis queer to think as it never changes. Year in, year out, 'tis the same old moon and the same light. I dare say those fields looked pretty much the same under the harvest moon before we was born or thought of, and they will look the same when we're dead and forgot. She has seen some queer things that old

moon, though she don't know no more than we do how 'twill be with us when she looks down at harvest-times to come. We are poor folk, not much better than aught else, sims to me. When I was in Pricehurst this afternoon I was looking at some boxes of writing paper in a shop as hadn't the blind down. 'Ah, you're like I am,' I thought to myself. 'You don't know what is going to happen to you. P'r'aps you will have a love letter wrote on you, or perhaps 'twill be a letter to say someone is dead, or a little gal will write to her dad on you.' 'Tis just the same with us. We can't choose how 'twill be with us, no more than that bit of paper can."

"You always was the one for queer fancies, Fred," said Sally softly. "I'm not sure but that wasn't why I liked you, from the very first. You was never quite like any other boy I knowed. Do you remember how they used to plague you when you first went to Bentwood, because you didn't like hurting things? Do you remember how, soon after I went there, in April 'twas, the farrier come to cut the lambs' tails and that, and they made you help him? You went all white. And, after all, 'twas naught."

"'Twas that great knife to those little tails," Fred explained.

"Oh, dear!" Sally laughed. "You are a funny chap!"

"I dare say it do sim funny. But they lambs was such little fellows, and so scared,"

108

"And there was that clutch of young thrushes, what you come to me to beg bread-and-milk for. You would slip off to where you had them in the barn, poor things, thinking nobody saw you! They would have been better dead, all the time, very likely."

"Ah! I came to you even in those days, Sally; 'twas you that understood. You never used to laugh at me, as the others did."

"Don't you be too sure of that, Fred. You was too comical for anything, sometimes. When I thought of it at night, 'twould shake the whole bed!"

"I don't mind if you did laugh, Sally. 'Twas not the laughter so much as the sort of laughter that I minded. But 'tis all done with."

"I mustn't be late, Fred," said Sally, suddenly realizing that night had come. "I must be back by ten. Do you think there's plenty of time?"

"Oh, 'ten't more nor half-past eight yet," Fred answered, eyeing the moon. "There is no call for you to be starting back yet. Let's go and sit under they haystacks; 'twill be dry there, and there is dew falling."

"All right, if you are sure," Sally agreed. "But 'tis steep down—you must give me your hand, else I slip."

As he turned to help her, and his eyes fell upon her, the tranquil feeling that had soothed Fred during their reminiscent conversation left him, and he felt quickening within him the vivid appeal of her personality.

With a mentality far more subtle than that of the ordinary country girl, Sally possessed also a physical being from which emanated a strange allurement, the attraction of the exotic that was vet not sufficiently unusual to repel. One of the girls at Bentwood, in a moment of intuition, had said that Sally was naked in spite of her clothes. But the intuition had been distorted and exaggerated by hostility. Sally did not belong to the ostentatiously sensuous type which such a criticism evokes. Any fortuitous display of her body would have been alien from her temperament. All the same, there was insight in the remark; for, in some indefinable way, Sally's figure—tall, thin, but slightly full-breasted-undesignedly and unconsciously did triumph over the garments that were designed to stifle its individuality. Her swift, unstudied gestures and movements were not merely the motions of this or that limb, but part of a rhythm to which the whole body was subject. And her face shared the intensely quick appeal of her body. In her the swarthiness of her mother had been modified to no more than a warmth of tone, which her intensely black hair and dark eyes reduced almost to pallor. But that pallor was vivified by a mobility that forecasted every shade of feeling and every action. Standing there, confident and expectant, her profound eyes rich with happiness, Sally was forgetful of the stigma of her parentage, which too often made her rebellious. Her impressionable nature, that responded to any chord careless hands

might pluck, was for the moment attuned to heedlessness.

With her hand in Fred's, she raced down the silent slope to the field below, heralded by an ever-widening scurry of uneasy rabbits, which moved and paused, like fallen leaves on a gusty day. Having reached the nearest haystack in the group which lay in an angle of fields not far from the foot of the hills, she sank to the ground; and Fred, eager for her kisses, dropped beside her, only to be repulsed.

"Don't come so near," Sally said. "I don't want you so close to-night."

"Why, what is the matter?" he asked. "One moment you say, 'Come closer,' and the next, 'Go away.' Have you forgotten Wednesday? You weren't so particular then."

"'Tis not that I'm particular, Fred. 'Tis—oh, you wouldn't understand!"

That provoking ending which to most men would have been an irresistible invitation to fathom the reputed unfathomable, was accepted by Fred without protest.

"Well, Sally, you shan't have cause to say I ever forced you to do aught you didn't want," he said. "But 'ten't so often we are out here away from the town."

With a sudden change of mood, Sally stretched out a hand to him.

"Don't talk like that, Fred," she implored. "I

ought to like you more for being so thoughtful as you are, but I don't. You are right. You always do as I ask; perhaps 'twould be wiser if you didn't."

"'Tis all right, Sally. 'Tis good enough for me to be with you; I am never happy but when I am; and it ought to be enough to be here. But it seems as if the clock stops when I meet you. 'Tis always, 'I shall be with her in so long,' and then 'tis over. It never sims to come. 'Twill be over before I know, and then I shall be waiting again."

"You didn't ought to look at things like that," Sally told him seriously. "It don't do no good."

"Don't you ever think things as is no use, your-self?"

Sally's face darkened.

"Don't I ever? Why, if I 'llowed to myself the thoughts I have, I could scarce bear living. We are both of a piece. 'Tis what a man is after, not what he has; mother once telled me. 'Tis not only maids and men it is true of, but everything. Not that it makes it any easier."

For a moment Fred looked at her curiously. From the short, quick rain of Sally's words he had seized the one drop that gave an insight into traditional feminine wisdom. He wondered what else mothers told their daughters. "'Tis like one of these trade unions," he told himself.

But, as if to show that she, at any rate, was a blackleg. Sally herself suddenly moved nearer.

"Don't let's think about anything," she said, offering her lips for kisses.

Fred, less adaptive, did not respond at once to her mood.

- "What was it made you keep me waiting so long to-day?" he asked.
 - "I told you before. I had to go somewhere."
 - "Where was it you had to go, I mean?"

Sally looked away with troubled eyes that scanned the distance, as if some guiding beacon might be discernible in the night sky.

- "What makes you so curious, all of a sudden?" she asked, turning again to Fred with drawn brows.
 - "I don't know. At least, you would laugh."
 - "As if I should!"

112

- "Well, you see, I am jealous like of when you are away. 'Tis so little I know of your life."
- "Are you really so gone on me as all that?" Sally inquired with interest.
 - "You know I am mad for you."
- "Ah, but 'tis a tame sort of madness, Fred. 'Tis a snail's madness.'

Fred, catching her in his arms, stared down at her parted lips, her insolent eyes.

- "Do you want it different?" he asked.
- "Sometimes," she breathed, closing her eyes in expectant ecstasy.
 - "'Tis how I'm made, you see," Fred explained,

passion dispersed by a realization of the profound curiosity of his own being.

"You don't really want me at all, I believe," Sally declared provocatively.

But, as Fred replied by kissing her, she writhed in his arms and scrambled to her knees.

- "Bide where you be, Fred," she implored.
- "I don't understand you," he answered. "Sims you don't want me yourself."
- "'Tisn't that I don't want you, Fred. P'r'aps 'tis because I do."

VIII

Lying on the ground, with chin on elbows, Sally stared at Fred.

- "What are you looking at?" he asked.
- "I was thinking that you will be the spit of your old dad, one of these days," she answered.

In reality, she was appraising him, fondling with her eyes his features, storing in her mind the look of his serious, simple eyes, and torturing herself with her voluntary abstinence from his caresses. In the placid moonlight, his face, always sensitive, seemed cast in a spiritual mould, his eyes distilled secret beauty, making him at once desirable and inaccessible, who was so accessible and responsive. He became unfamiliar, his every attribute charged with an allurement more potent because it was strange. Sally's mind sped back

to the days when kisses were to her exotic flowers, so rare as to seem charged with mystery. They were not kisses then, but charms releasing indescribable potencies of ecstasy. And Fred, the everyday, the oftenconned, in that moment became imbued with the power to reawaken those yearnings, so long unsavored.

"Give me your hand, Fred," she said, rudely demolishing the fabric of her fancies. "I must hurry. I am sure 'tis ever so late."

When Fred, with ease, had lifted her bodily to her feet, she laughed happily.

- "You are strong enough for two, you great bear," she said.
- "Strong enough for we two," he amended, linking his fingers about her yielding waist.
- "When are we going to walk out—proper?" he asked, his lips almost upon hers.
- "Don't you call this walking out? 'Tisn't many girls as would sit half the night in fields with a boy, and not be walking out!"
 - "Are you serious, Sally?"
 - "What do you think?"
 - "Will you marry me? That is what I mean."
 - "I know."
- "But will you? It don't do you no good teasing my heart away, do it? En't I to have no feelings, except when you want me to?"
 - "Oh, Fred, let me go!" Sally implored.
 - "Not till you say. Don't you like me?"

- "You know I do."
- "Well, will you marry me?"
- "Don't torment me so. Please give over, Fred."
- "'Tis Tom, I suppose."
- " Tom!"
- "You don't care for him, then?"
- "How many more questions have I got to answer?"
- "There is no need to answer more than the one."

Sally felt trapped. Yet, instead of being angry, she found a curious pleasure in her position. But she did not respond to Fred's hint.

- "Oh, I dare say!" she threw out, an experimental flippancy.
 - "Well, do you care for Tom, then?"
- "I don't know. How can I know? Sometimes I do, sometimes I don't."

Bald truth would perhaps quieten this persistent claimant.

"Ah! 'Tis the same with me, I suppose," Fred said sadly. "Sometimes you like me, sometimes you don't. Half-like is no-like, they say."

His hands relaxed, and Sally, freed, began to walk away.

"Do come!" she implored. "'Tis getting later and later."

Dejectedly, he obeyed her, and they began to cross the fields towards the road.

"You aren't to come beyond where the Fidding path is," Sally said. "You will never be home, else."

- "I suppose 'tis that I en't good enough for you," Fred said dolefully, his mind still occupied by the conversation in the field.
 - "Your old dad would have another story to tell!"
- "They always said I was a bit fond, all except Mr. Peters. But I don't see as I am. I can't help being what I am, and I do my work as well nor anyone else, I reckon."
- "Don't talk so foolish," Sally commanded. "Fond! They're fond themselves. You are a cut above they lot. Why don't you wake up, 'stead of slaving at your old farm? I would think too much of myself to, if I was you."
- "Come to that, why do you slave at the 'Cricketers' Arms'? 'Tis no great shakes, that job, I lay."
- "'Ten't everybody will take me on, you see. 'Tisn't as if I was you, Fred. They look at me: 'There is that Sally Dean; we know all about her,' they say to themselves."
- "I didn't ought to have said it. 'Twas thoughtless of me, Sally."
- "'Tis little I mind what you say; or they, for that matter."
 - "They wouldn't say it if you was married."
- "They would say it the more. That shows all you know! They will be at me, trust them, till their jaws is worn out," Sally retorted, and fell into an angry silence.

1 Weak-minded.

- "When shall I see you again?" Fred asked, after a pause.
- "I can hardly say. You must take your chance. If you be at the same place Sunday, I'll see what I can do."
- "Sunday! Surely there en't no need to wait so long?"
- "I can't help it, Fred. Truly I can't. You don't know. Oh, why is things so difficult?"
 - "I don't see they are."
 - "You don't know."
- "I suppose you have got a hull string of other chaps as you sometimes like and sometimes don't," Fred retorted, stung by disappointment.
- "How can you say such a thing!" Sally breathed, shooting a troubled glance at him; and then, arrogantly, "And if I have? Do you suppose you and Tom is the only ones I could have? I can tell you one thing——"
 - "Go on," Fred requested grimly.
 - "I won't!"

They walked on in angry silence until they reached the stile that led to the Fidding path.

- "Aren't you going to give us a kiss?" Fred asked then.
- "I can't, Fred," Sally answered. "I didn't ought ever to have come. I'm going to be married."

Fred stared at her, and then the numbing unexpectedness of her words surrendered to intolerable pain.

"Say it en't true, Sally!" he implored. "Sally darling, say it en't true! I can't let you go."

"But 'tis true," she answered. "Oh, why did I tell you!"

IX

When Fred reached the cottage it was in darkness, but, by the light of a match which he struck in the kitchen, he saw that Liddy had left some supper for him on the table. While he was lighting the lamp, Liddy herself came down-stairs, in her nightdress, with an old cloak pulled round her shoulders.

- "Oh, Fred, you are late!" she said. "Wherever have you been?"
- "You ought to be asleep, Lid," Fred said, ignoring her question.

"I kep' awake on purpose to tell you to be quiet when you come in. Dad has bin reg'lar wild. He didn't like it when I tell him you and Tom was both out, and when Tom come back 'twas worse, and they had words. He kep' saying how late you was, and when you never come home to supper, nor before 'twas time for'n to go to bed, he was reg'lar put out. I knew if you started making a noise while you was at your supper, he'd wake and come in. He en't so wonderful young, and 'twould do him no good with the work he have got before him to-morrow. And so vexed as he

be, I was afraid if he once started going for you, it might lead to trouble."

Owing to the lack of bedrooms in the cottage, Bob had converted what originally was the parlor into a bedroom for himself when the boys grew up, and Liddy's warning was well justified, for only a thin partition divided it from the kitchen, so that even a slight noise might rouse him.

"All right, Liddy," Fred answered. "I will be careful. I don't want to upset'n. But don't you go standing about, or you'll be catching cold. 'Tis in bed you ought to be."

"Me catch cold? "Ten't likely!" Liddy exclaimed scornfully. "You git on with your supper. I put just a shatter of coals on last thing, and now I'm going to hot you up a cup of cocoa. "Twill comfort you, and you have an early day before you."

"'Twas good of you to think of it," Fred said gratefully. "You are always the one to think of other folks, Lid; but you didn't ought to do it, so late as it is."

Fred's words made Liddy rather ashamed of herself—for in the present instance her goodness was tempered by policy. For a time she said nothing, and busied herself by blowing the embers beneath the kettle which had been left on them to simmer. But when a faint, peevish murmur showed that the kettle had capitulated, and made up its mind to boil, she broke her silence.

120

"Fred," she said, rather nervously, "Fred, you won't be mad if I ask you something?"

"No, Lid, I en't likely to be mad with you," Fred answered, his voice conveying an emphatic distinction between his sister and anyone else.

"Well. Is it true as 'tis Sally Dean what you and Tom goes over to Pricehurst after?"

Fred was overcome by the consternation of a weak nature that is devastated by an implied condemnation, irrespective of its justice.

"I s'pose 'tis," he answered reluctantly, as if reluctance would mitigate the admission. Even as he spoke there broke upon him some perception of the irony of Liddy's question, coming as it did when Pricehurst expeditions were over.

"You mustn't be mad," Liddy implored, looking at her brother with appealing sincerity. "But it didn't ought to be."

"You don't know how 'tis, Lid."

"She is not good enough for you, Fred. Have you ever thought what she is? She has bad blood in her, and they say she en't a good girl herself."

"It don't matter to me who she is, nor what she is," Fred answered sullenly. "But you can be easy in your mind. She won't have none of me."

"Oh, poor old Fred!" Liddy said with instant compassion, his announcement causing a volte face in her heart. "Has she bin telling you tonight?"

"Yes. 'Tis all over wi' me. She done with me. I en't good enough, I suppose."

Liddy suppressed indignant denials, realizing that they would only aggravate Fred's sores.

- "What is she doing about Tom?" she asked.
- "I don't know nothing about Tom. I dessay she will send him packing, too."
- "Well, Fred, don't you think you could persuade him to give her up, however 'tis? 'Twould pretty near kill dad if she had him. 'Twould disgrace him in everyone's eyes, and he so proud and looked-up to."
- "Me speak to Tom! You don't know what you are asking, Liddy. "Twould be like poking my thumb in a ferret's mouth. 'Sides, 'ten't for me to speak. He would only think I was sour."
- "Perhaps you are right. Maybe 'twouldn't do for you to speak," Liddy agreed thoughtfully. "Sims I shall have to ask him myself."
- "Leave him be," Fred advised her. "'Twould do no good, you speaking. And Tom en't like me. As like as not he will be mad with you, and all to no purpose."

They left it at that, and Liddy, having watched Fred drink his cocoa, went back to her room, while Fred took off his boots with their noisy hobnails, followed her up the stairs and entered the room he shared with Tom. He took no light with him; for, even in their then comparative prosperity, the family retained most of their frugal traditions, among which was the

122

habit of undressing without a candle. But it was not dark in the room. The moon, that same moon which a few hours previously had shone upon Sally's upturned face as she lay in his arms, sent a silvery shaft through the window upon the shabby boards of the floor, illuminating the whole room with soft effulgence.

There, in the double bed, lay Tom, his brother and rival, his Sunday curl still plastered upon his forehead, his sunburned face reposeful in sleep. As he undressed, Fred looked at the sleeper, asking himself if it could be he whom Sally had chosen. It seemed unlikely for many reasons; and, too, Sally had greeted his name derisively enough. But then, as Fred knew well enough, Sally was not very reliable, her passion for truth was always subordinate to the contingencies of momentary impulse or expediency. Should he break the artificial silence that existed, tell Tom what Sally had revealed, even say what Liddy had asked him to say?

With a nervous gesture Fred turned away. Why should he make things easier for Tom, who never considered anyone but himself? Why should he concern himself where he was no longer concerned? He felt disheartened, deprived of interest in anything except the fact that Sally was no longer his. It seemed incredible. Only a few hours before, as, with thickening pulse, he waited for her to meet him, he had dwelt on the fact that she was his, she who was so warm and strange. But, come what might, he had held her in his

arms, swayed her whole being with tumultuous ecstasy. But if Tom won her? Lucky Tom, who, come what might, never had, never would have, such strange emotions as himself, but stolid and swaggering, looked only at facts, oblivious to maddening fancies.

X

During the last heavy days of harvest, Tom, who was ignorant of what Sally had told his brother, was unable to visit Pricehurst. With Tom, those who were out of sight were out of mind, to this extent, that, unlike Fred, he did not mentally paw and tease their images, building tentative edifices of motives and innuendoes, only to see them distressingly collapse, as a child sees collapse his insecurely built card palaces. His mental attitude towards those with whom he was brought into contact, in fact, changed only as the result of compelling circumstances. Having heard nothing to affect his relationship towards Sally, her impress remained in his mind, without largely affecting him when he was absent from her. It was there. immovable but impassive, allowing his thoughts free action, as a rock in a channel allows the waters to play about it, pass and repass, with merely an eddy here, or a pucker there, to betray its presence.

So, during those days, like everyone else in the village, Tom went about the business of loading corn-

124

sheaves, or driving laden carts to the stackyard at the farm, placidly resolved to see Sally as soon as might be, but meanwhile sufficiently easy in his mind to throw pleasantries, as unimaginative as dough-balls, at any reasonably comely girl with whom he came in contact.

It was not until the last of the harvest had been carted, and the older men, who alone possessed the art, were busy, with comb and mallet, thatching the stacks, and surveying with suppressed gratification their juniors acting as unskilled assistants, that Tom was free to visit Pricehurst, and various thoughts, which until then had lain dormant and unformulated in his mind, awoke and impelled him to action. And with them awoke a Rip Van Winkle of an idea that had fallen asleep in the act of germination during Fred's absence the previous week. It would be as well for him to see Sally again without delay.

Tom had always possessed one definite advantage over Fred—as a carter, he was often sent to Pricehurst during the week, whereas Fred seldom finished work in time to walk over in the evenings, and usually had to content himself with Sunday visits. But these week-day journeys of Tom's were only partially satisfactory. Often he was able to see Sally, it was true, but their meetings on such occasions were unsatisfactory enough, being usually limited to a few minutes' conversation in the yard of the "Cricketers' Arms." On this occasion, however, having received welcome orders

to deliver a load of beans in the town, he made up his mind that, happen what might, he would make Sally give him a satisfying audience. The suspiciously long absence of Fred on the previous Sunday, having once re-presented itself to his mind, swelled into a bogey of prodigious purport. There came to him slowly but irresistibly the conviction that Fred, with his soft and slippery ways, had got round Sally at last; to what purpose who could tell? He had always distrusted poor Fred's ingenious delicacy of mind, for with him incomprehension meant suspicious aversion.

Enhanced by sleek artifice of hair, with cap so poised as to reveal a tantalizing glimpse of the ordered fringe, that broke upon his brow like the buttery billow of a glossy sea, he set off to Pricehurst, riding on the shafts of his heavily laden wagon. At first, as he drove, the possibilities of Fred's machinations made frightful depredations on his simple and usually so dauntless But before long his stouter body buttressed his tottering spirit. Stimulated by the cold bacon and bread he was munching, and by the warm air and radiant sunlight, his admirable flesh influenced the brain that controlled it. He found it increasingly difficult to be uneasy, every minute the claims of his own superiority became more pressing. Fred dwindled. shriveled like a burned thread, into an insignificant clown. Was it likely that Sally would prefer such a one to himself, whom half the girls in Fidding regarded with round-eyed longing? Sally might perhaps

have fooled a bit with Fred; perhaps indeed she had done so to an extent that rather detracted from the dignity of himself, as her future husband. Yes, husband! He would marry her. He would take her to himself in spite of her inferiority, an inferiority that was, indeed, abject.

So Tom's thoughts ran, limped rather, for they reached that predetermined destination only after half an hour's driving, being at the best ambling hacks, and during that time burdened and blinkered by his almost incredible self-esteem. So blinded were they that he really believed he was yielding to long-suppressed good nature, in determining to ask Sally to marry him; whereas, in reality, his failure to do so in the past was entirely due to the fact that his inagile mind had failed to grasp his gradual progression from bovine blandishment to dull infatuation. In reality, had Sally felt inclined to survey his heart upon her palm, she could have exacted the oblation at any time without the least difficulty.

Bold as Tom was in dealing with familiar things, he had no confidence in himself when tackling the unfamiliar; and he had never been able to accustom himself to ask for Sally at the back door of the "Cricketers' Arms" without nervous perturbation that was apt to affect his conversation for some time. That afternoon, however, he felt that assurance was a desirable quality, even when throwing oneself away in a generous caprice, and, after obtaining leave to put

up his horse and wagon in the yard of the factor to whom his load was consigned, called at a small publichouse before going to see Sally.

It was, therefore, with fortified resolve that he pulled the bell and asked the woman who answered it if he could speak to Sally, and with benign calm that he awaited her coming. But instead of Sally answering his summons, the woman to whom he had given the message returned.

"Sally says she'm sorry, but she be dreadful busy and en't got time to see you," she said, regarding him with maternal interest.

It was well for Tom that he had reinforced his resolutions beforehand. Instead of having to retreat abashed, with incoherent fury, a means of meeting this reverse presented itself to him with welcome readiness.

"If 'twould not be troubling you too far, perhaps you would say as I have a message from Mrs. Clarke," he said, surprised and edified by his artifice.

His ruse was successful. Doubtful of the truth of Tom's statement, especially as Mrs. Clarke and herself had been completely out of touch for more than a year, Sally was nevertheless sufficiently curious to abandon the discretion that had prompted her first refusal to see him.

"Well, what is it?" she asked, with defensive curtness, when she reached the door.

Tom giggled with delight at his subtlety.

"I knew 'twould bring you," he observed. "You thought old Mrs. Clarke had sent me, didn't you?"

"No, that I didn't!" Sally answered frankly. "No one but a born fool like yourself would have named her, seeing she and me don't have naught to do with each other. What is it you want?"

"Well, Sally, 'tis true it wasn't she sent me," Tom answered. "But I want to see you particular."

"Didn't I tell you I was busy?"

T 28

"Now don't deny me, Sally. 'Tis important. I must see you. I come over a-purpose," Tom declared, almost believing the beer-prompted falsehood.

Sally regarded him austerely.

"I can't see you, I tell you," she said; and then, her poor fortitude subsiding, "not now, anyway."

"I can wait, if 'ten't too long. When can you come?"

"Well—say about seven. Perhaps I'll see if I can slip out then."

"Say you will, Sally. 'Tis important, I tell you. Say you will, for certain."

"Well, I will, then. But, you mustn't go hanging about the place, Tom. It don't look well. You never know who mightn't see you. The old man do go on so about anything of that sort. Just slip over to the stables. There en't likely to be nobody there, and if there is, 'twill only be Sam, as don't matter. Seven, mind. I'll come, but not for long."

She went, leaving Tom in a state of restless excite-

ment, which was only increased by the draughts of beer he took to quell it during the succeeding hours. He did not question the cause of his excitement, did not even realize that the moment was a dramatic one. But he was influenced and quickened by its drama, as a savage, devoid of all conscious sense of rhythm, is stirred by a tom-tom. He tasted the full flavor of the moment, with palate unstaled by apprehensions. What did he care that before the time to meet Sally arrived he ought to be back to Fidding? He was not only careless of the fact, but completely overlooked it. He had forgotten even his assumed generosity, remembering only Sally, knowing only that he could not do without her.

She came to him in the stables, after he had waited for ten minutes in aching expectancy, slipped in a shaft of sunlight through the door, and, having closed it, stood, a dim figure, awaiting him in the gloom.

"I have come, you see," she said.

For a perceptible time, the immensity of Tom's sensations kept him inarticulate.

"Sally!" was his husky and inadequate response, at length.

"What was it you wanted so particular?" she asked, not only influenced by the dramatic quality of their meeting there in the twilight, but, unlike Tom, fully alive to it, bathing her senses in it, consciously and pleasantly, stirred.

Obeying his nature, to which physical expression

came so much more readily than speech, Tom went to her, put his arms round her, and, aided by contact with her eloquent body, found that he could speak.

"Sally, you got to marry me," he told her.

"Let me go! You brute, Tom. I hate you!" Sally said fiercely, and fought to escape the voluntarily imposed fetters of encircling arms.

"'Tain't not a bit of use squirming," Tom assured her delightedly. Here was something he could deal with, physically, satisfactorily. "Gently! You have kept me off long enough. I want some of they kisses you give Fred last Sunday."

"What do you mean?" Sally inquired, pausing inquisitively.

"Ah! And a smart lot of other times, I lay. I am tired of being put to heel like I was a durned dog. And I ain't going to be. I have got you, my gal!"

"'Tisn't fair. Let me go!"

Could Sally's protest have been a shade less vehement than before?

"'Tis fair enough."

130

She felt the lifting grip of his arms about her, seemed lost almost in the magnitude of his embrace, and relaxed with impulsive, eager surrender.

"Sims you don't want to kiss me, after all!" she murmured.

A moment later, she broke burning from his arms, crying: "Why did I come? Oh, I am hateful!"

In exaltation of remorse, she fled him; her footsteps clattered on the cobbles in the yard, and silence fell.

Tom, slowly recovering from bemused reaction, set out to the place in which he had left his horse and cart, puzzled but rather proud of himself. He did not realize that his purpose in seeing Sally remained unfulfilled. The thought did not occur to him till he was well away on the Fidding road, and then, when it did, the impact was so forcible that he pulled his horse up dead, and swore earnestly in the glamour of the moonlight.

XI

The excited barking of a dog heralded Tom's return to Bentwood Farm. But when the cart turned into the yard, and jolted heavily towards the cart-house, the dog, recognizing horse and driver, became silent, and writhed in sinuous figures of welcome, a bizarre shape in the moonlight, his chain rattling an erratic accompaniment. There was no other sound. The sable shadows seemed to emphasize the peace of the quiet air and starry sky. One window alone in the house across the way kept vigil with discreet, unwinking light.

During the drive home, Tom's exhilaration had ebbed, leaving his mind high and dry, a lodge for fore-bodings that earlier had assailed it in vain. Slipping swiftly from his seat, he set about unharnessing his horse, the speed of his actions checked only by his

desire to avoid making a noise. With a quiet mutter to the horse, he led it to the stable, cursing the beast's ponderous shod hooves that struck devastating reports from the cobbles, as, with unhurried calm, it slouched onwards. The cart he decided to leave where it stood, preferring to do that rather than go through the noisy process of backing it over the cobbles into the shed.

But when he emerged from the stable, feeling lucky to have escaped without meeting his employer, he saw, with sinking heart, a figure standing surveying the wagon outside the cart-shed. It was Mason, the farmer, who was calmly awaiting his certain prey.

- "That you, Garrett?" he called loudly. "What do you think you are doing coming back at this time? Why, 'tis only just back of nine o'clock. You ought to have been home by five at latest. What have you been doing, man?"
- "I didn't hardly think it was so late," Tom explained lamely.
- "Think your grandmother! What have you been doing?"
 - "I just looked in at the 'Anchor.'"
 - " Well?"
 - "And I went to see a friend of mine."
 - "What did you do with the horse?"
 - "I left'n at Mr. Enderby's."
 - "Did he have a feed?"
 - "Yes, sir," Tom answered promptly.
 - "And who do you think's got to pay for the beast

being put up and getting a feed while you're visiting your friends, I would like to know? You don't suppose Enderby does it for nothing, do you?"

"I didn't hardly think."

"No, that you didn't, I'll be bound. What have you done with they goods you were to bring back with you?"

Tom stood aghast, groping for some way of softening the truth.

- "Come, out with it! You forgot them, I suppose?"
- "Ah, they did just slip my mind."

"You are a damn fool, Garrett, and you are a damn nuisance. You think no end of yourself, I've no doubt. But you are no use. You are more bother than you are worth. Time after time I am telling you things, and you never do them proper. I wouldn't have stood you as long as I have if 'twasn't for your grandfather. He is worth ten of ye. You young chaps don't know your jobs, nor never will. Yet you are that independent ——! Well, I will give you a tip. You be looking out for somewhere else. I shan't be taking you on again, grandfather or no."

The farmer struck his stick against his leggings emphatically.

"Now, you needn't go slinking off," he said. "Do you think I'm going to have my wagons left out all night because you're too lazy to shift them?"

"'Ten't that, sir," Tom answered sulkily. "Sides, 'ten't as if 'twas likely to break before morning."

"It don't matter if the weather is likely to break or no. I'm not going to have my yard in a rops. Come, lend a hand! You can push, I suppose, if you can't do anything else."

Together they worked the wagon into the long open shed; while the dog, losing interest, ceased to weave nervous figures, and retired into his kennel, to lie with head on paws, one eye only holding a watching brief in the proceedings.

XII

That afternoon, Liddy had seen Tom's optimistic passage through the village in the wagon, and when the time at which he might be expected to return passed without his appearance, she felt certain that, as was indeed the case, he had taken the opportunity to see Sally. Distressed as she was, she determined to do all she could to prevent her grandfather guessing that Tom had any object in visiting Pricehurst apart from the fact that he had been sent there from the farm. When Bob returned that evening, therefore, she resorted to subterfuge.

- "Mason sent Tom into Pricehurst late enough," she remarked casually.
- "Ah? What time did he go?" her grandfather asked, showing that he had heard nothing about it.
 - "I didn't actually glance at the clock," Liddy

explained, with some faint idea of quieting her conscience, "but it must have bin somewhere about six."

"Six! That is late enough, as you say. What was he sent with?"

"It looked like 'twas a load of beans."

"Very likely 'twas. Enderby's bin crying out pretty sharp. That'll be how 'twas, 'pend upon it," her grandfather agreed, and began to unlace his boots. "I shall put on they old crabs of mine, I think," he added. "These boots sims to draw my feet something cruel to-day."

While he was so occupied, Liddy shot a swift glance at Fred.

"'Tis hardly likely Tom will be home afore nine or ten, is it, seeing how late he was starting?" she asked, with a warning face.

"Ah," Fred agreed cautiously.

Luckily for Liddy's purpose, her grandfather was in a kindly, reminiscent mood that evening, and after pottering about in the garden, carrying on meanwhile a desultory conversation with his granddaughter, went off to bed without referring again to Tom.

"'Tis lucky he didn't get off about Tom," Liddy said thoughtfully to Fred, when her grandfather shut his bedroom door. "He do get that wild! You best cut off, too, and I will set out a bit of supper for Tom. How late he is!"

"'Twas more like three nor six, he went," Fred observed.

136

"I know 'twas, you great booby. You didn't think I really thought it were six, did you?"

"I don't know what you thought, but I guessed summat were up, by the way you was pulling faces at me."

"'Twas in case you knowed when he started. However, you best be getting to bed. There is no call for you to stop up."

"I am not in any hurry. I can see to his supper. I want to have a word or two with Tom when he do come."

Liddy glanced at her brother doubtfully, and decided not to oppose him.

"Just as you like, Fred," she said. "In that case, I think I will get undressed. I dessay he would fancy of a cup of tea, coming in so late."

When Liddy went up-stairs, Fred took a chair into the little garden and sat down to watch for his brother's return in the wagon from Pricehurst, not knowing that he had already passed and was even then at the farm. Fred felt intensely nervous, and pulled quickly at his pipe. Having made up his mind to speak to Tom, he knew that very likely there would be trouble, and, in his mind, he rehearsed the expected scene over and over again, wondering all the time whether really he would be able to overcome his reserve when the time came, or slink ignominiously to bed. The one fact that fortified him was Liddy's knowledge of his intention. He valued her good opinion, at all costs must

not forfeit it by shirking his self-imposed task. But Liddy did not really know what that task was. She imagined that Fred had submitted to her argument on the previous Sunday, and intended to pit persuasion against Tom's infatuation for Sally. In reality, Fred had no such idea. At first Sally's statement that she was going to be married had been accepted by him as an irrevocable death-blow to his hopes. His too-pliant temperament had made him passively accept defeat. envying at the same time Tom's good fortune, if it were indeed Tom whom Sally had chosen. But, as the days passed, he became increasingly convinced that Tom was ignorant of any change in Sally's relationship Above all things Tom was transparent, towards him. and Fred felt sure that the evenings he had spent stealthily watching his brother, and trying to interpret his moods and actions, could not have passed without Tom discovering any such secret, if only by an increased assurance. If, then, Tom had been unaware of Sally's declared decision, it meant either that Sally was waiting for Tom to ask her to accept him, or that already she had accepted someone else. Tom's visit to Pricehurst, and, as a corollary, to Sally, that afternoon, surely would have settled which was the case; for Sally would lose no time in effecting capitulation or rout. To Fred's nervousness at bearding his brother, therefore, was added intense dread of the revelation that probably would result.

Fred had not sat there long before he heard foot-

steps approaching. Guessing that they heralded Tom, he picked up his chair and returned to the kitchen, where Tom found him pouring water into the teapot.

"How is it you en't gone to bed?" Tom asked suspiciously.

"I thought 'twould save Liddy getting your supper," Fred answered ingratiatingly.

Tom merely grunted.

"Besides, I wanted to have a word with you."

"Well, no one is preventing you that I know of."

"You are proper late," Fred fenced cravenly, seeing as you started soon after three, and only had to go to Enderby's, that is."

"I don't see what it has got to do with you, if I am."

"I suppose you seen Sally?"

Fred had kicked off at last, nearly shivering in his nervousness.

"What if I have? She don't belong to you, do she?"

"Did she tell you as she was going to be married?"

"She don't tell me things like that."

"She told me so, Sunday."

"Ah! I dare say she did; Sally is a rare gal for putting off chaps as she don't want," Tom retorted admiringly, and, while Fred considered his next words, carried on a little colloquy in his mind. "Told'n she was going to be married! That's rich! I'm durned if she en't a proper little beauty!"

"You mean to say you don't think she is?" Fred asked.

"Don't think? Of course I don't think! She en't going to be married just yet a while, not till I ask her. Though so happen I am going to, next time I see her. I will ask you to the wedding, Fred; don't you take on!"

Fred stared at him, his eyes brilliant with excited speculation. What could it mean? Could it be true that Sally was not serious, that she was merely adopting a way of her own to discard him, in favor, perhaps, of Tom?

"What makes you say she en't going to be married to someone else?" he asked.

"That is good!" Tom exclaimed, with supreme amusement. The scene in the stable that evening rose in his mind, with the simple interpretation he put upon it. To him Sally's cries of self-reproach had been merely the alarmed chirps of a bird too suddenly taken in the hands. "Why do I say so?" he continued. "Because I know."

"Well, if you are right, you have no more claim to her nor I have," Fred answered anxiously. "You saw her to-day, it's my turn to see her next."

"What are you getting at?" Tom asked doubtfully.

"I am not getting at anything, except that I got as much right to ask her as you."

"Oh, you can ask!"

"Well, will you let me see her next?"

SHEPHERD'S WARNING

"What is going to stop you?"

140

- "I mean, before you do. I en't got the chances you have—going over for Mason as you do. 'Twon't be till Sunday as I shall be able. Will you wait till after then, before seeing her again?"
- "I don't know so much about that," Tom said distrustfully. What maggot had Fred got in his head? There was something behind it, he felt sure; his very opacity making him suspect subtleties that did not exist.
- "Well, if you are so sure she will have you, why can't you wait a few days?" Fred asked.
 - "Ah! I am sure enough."
 - "Well, do you agree?"
- "I will tell you what," Tom announced slowly. "I will toss you for it." There could hardly be any hankey-pankey about the fall of a coin, he reflected comfortably.

Fred moved nervously.

"All right," he agreed.

He watched with tense emotion while his brother leisurely extracted from his pocket a dirty flap-purse, leisurely opened it, and peered into it, finally producing a coin and spitting on it.

- "Now then!" Tom announced.
- "Heads!" Fred called.

The coin shot up into the air, like a fluttering moth, flashed in the light, and fell with a sharp ring on the brick floor.

"The woman!" Tom announced with a sneering chuckle.

Fred had lost.

XIII

The dimly-lighted room, the conversation subdued for fear of waking Bob, and the sudden reaction of decision upon his tautly strung nerves, made it seem to Fred that he had been dealt a shrewd and mocking reverse by Fate, instead merely of his having staked and lost on a forlorn and in any case indecisive hope. He went to bed dejected, but without any feeling of bitterness towards Tom, who, in the same room, was undressing with apparent optimism. Had Fred known it, however, his brother had little enough cause for congratulation apart from the thick head that rendered him impervious to any but the most concrete and irrefutable bludgeonings. How he would act if Sally became his prize, as he had not the least doubt she would. Tom did not consider. He had been practically turned away from the farm, and, although laborers were scarce, could scarcely hope that one so little skilled as himself would be able to command more than a pittance for wage. His wage at Bentwood, indeed, was a pittance; but it had always been understood without any reference, it may be said, to his grandfather-that if he married, his wife would share the existing home. To live elsewhere at the same wage,

SHEPHERD'S WARNING

142

without the advantage of a rent-free home, would be a very different matter. Tom, however, did not concern himself much with his dismissal. He had never felt the clutch of adversity, and had not sufficient imagination to court it. The time when his sentence of dismissal would come into force seemed so far distant that it was hard to believe it would ever arrive. His only feeling in the matter was a dull resentment against the farmer who had so humiliated him. Even that feeling, however, had become subordinate to an aggravating and elusive theory that his brother was up to something where Sally was concerned. Before falling asleep, he made up his mind that he would bring young Fred's cleverness to a fault, on this occasion at any rate. He would go over and get a definite answer from Sally at the very first chance. She would not evade it this time, he decided, and felt extremely clever, as if already he had outwitted and subdued her.

Tom, of course, did not reveal his subtle design to Fred, and it so happened that, for several days, he had no opportunity of going over to the town, except in the evening, when in the ordinary way it was not possible to see Sally. Fred, meanwhile, lived on the threshold of nervous despondency, watched his brother with gloomy expectance, and parried, so well as he was able, Liddy's demands to be told what had passed between Tom and himself that evening. Liddy got no satisfaction from him; indeed, the only clue she obtained merely mystified her the more. It was a statement

made by her grandfather that, while he lay in bed that night, listening to the low drone of the voices in the kitchen, he had heard the ring of a falling coin, followed by the words: "The woman!" Pitch-andtoss or summat, they were playing, he assured Liddy with gloomy disgust. He had knowed it all along. 'Twas only what you'd expect, seeing how they hung about they pubs over at Pricehurst.

At length, when Fred was beginning to tend a frail nursling hope that after all it might be himself who reached the town first. Tom received orders to lead some coal from Pricehurst to the farm. He was so elated that he walked half a mile to convey the news to Fred, who was ploughing, and was rewarded by the knowledge that his brother's envious eyes would follow him as he jolted along the road down the valley. was a boisterous day, with a fine driving rain that made it necessary for Tom to protect himself with a sack, which, split down one side and drawn over head and shoulders, gave him a monkish look. But, bathed in the sun of his gratification, he dreamt benignly enough. regardless of the steady drip of rain from his strawcolored moustache.

Fred did not sit up that night, and it was as well that he did not do so. He knew well enough, when bedtime came to find Tom absent, that something decisive had happened, but when once in bed, he expected every minute to hear the sound of hobnailed boots on the path beneath the window. Yet he seemed

to lie there interminably waiting without hearing the expected sound. But he had been working all day, and fatigue overcame his vigilance. He fell asleep at length without having seen his brother return.

In the morning Fred was awakened by Liddy.

- "Fred," she said anxiously, "en't Tom come home?" Her eyes traveled across the bed, confirming her fears. "Oh, dear! whatever will dad say! You don't think nothing has happened, do you?"
 - "Oh, no, 'tis nothing like that," Fred assured her.
- "Whatever can it be? You don't think he has bin with—that Sally, do you?"
- "I don't know nothing about it," Fred answered, refusing to admit an implication so distressing to him.

Bob, when he came into the kitchen to eat a hasty breakfast, looked round at Liddy and Fred.

- "Where is Tom?" he asked. "I never heard him come home; he en't overslep himself, has he, Fred? I'm durned if I will have these goings on. I warned him often enough."
 - "He en't come back yet, dad," said Liddy fearfully.
 - "He en't back yet?"

Her grandfather's quiet repetition of her words was the last thing Liddy expected; but, hearing it, she realized that he was using the extremity of self-control to refrain from a violent outburst. She saw his hand trembling as he raised his cup to his mouth, saw his old puckered face working with suppressed emotion, his lips twitch, his eyebrows draw together. Even as he fought with himself, the door opened, and Tom entered the room, looking pale and dejected.

- "You have come home, then!" his grandfather observed, with a glint in his eyes, precursor of gathering lightning.
- "She's gone," Tom announced, looking at his brother.
 - "Gone! What do you mean?"
- "She's gone. She en't there no longer. She have took her things; she don't mean to go back no more."
- "Who are you talking about?" the old man asked angrily.
 - "Sally Dean."
- "Do you mean to tell me you have bin after that girl from under my own roof!"
- "She be gone, I tell you. It won't make no difference though you go on never so."
- "A good job, too. You can think yourself lucky. If I had have known before, out you would have gone, neck and crop. Do you think I would have stood it?—she as had her father hanged on her, and a mother swep' up like dirt from the road. That sort of gal. Do you know what she is? She en't no better nor a baggage herself, and there is many will tell you as much."
 - "'Tweren't only me. Fred was seeing her, too."
- "Fred was, was he? En't neither of you got no proper feeling?" the old man retorted, but his anger was subsiding. Indeed, when he realized more clearly

146

that the disreputable incident was over, he felt almost jubilant. But he turned again to Tom, remembering that the latter's absence had not been explained.

- "Where was you all night?" he asked.
- "'Tis getting late, dad," Liddy interposed, with ingenuous diplomacy.

"Ah, so 'tis," her grandfather agreed, looking at the clock on the chimney-piece. "I must be moving. Time won't wait while I talk to the likes of you."

He shot a sour glance at his grandsons, picked up a small straw basket containing his dinner, and started for the farm.

- "You will have to be off, too, both of you," Liddy said to her brothers, after a short silence.
- "Ah, that I will, and for longer nor you reckon!" Tom answered gloomily.

Liddy looked at him interrogatively.

- "I have 'listed."
- "What, you bin and 'listed just because that gal did you a good turn by running away from you! You never mean it, Tom!"
 - "'Tis true enough."
 - "But whatever made you do a thing like that?"

That was precisely what Tom himself had been wondering for some hours.

"Well, you see, I was feeling purty pingley wi' Sally being gone, and that; and I got talking to one of these here recruiting chaps, and, after we'd had a

glass or two, I got telling him how I had lost my gal, and my job, too ——"

- "Lost your job?" Liddy interrupted.
- "Ah. Mason as good as warned me that night as I was late from Pricehurst, last week."
 - "Oh, dear! What will dad say when he hears!"
- "It won't make no difference, not what he says, Lid."
 - "Well, get on with it!"
- "I don't rightly mind how 'twas after that, but he fixed me up all right, and kep' me down at they barracks last night. You see, I weren't hardly fit to get home by the time we had done. He give me my bob, though, and I en't spent it."

Tom produced a shilling and threw it on to the table. All three stared at it with rather awed sensations. It was no longer a mere coin, but a symbol and badge of servitude, the price of a body and the ransom of a soul.

- "What did you do with your wagon?" Fred asked.
- "I took it back 'smorning."
- "Ah. What did Mason say to ye?"
- "Oh, I told him what I thought of'n, proper."
- "That you did, I lay!" Liddy exclaimed derisively. "I would have liked to see you at it. 'Twas little you had to say, I'll be bound. Well, I hope you won't be sorry for what you done."
- "Why should I be?" Tom protested, without conviction.

"Oh, 'tis always the same with you chaps as 'list. It don't take long to make you wish you was out of it."

"I have had enough of this place, anyway. There en't nothing could be worse than Fidding—durned dead-and-alive place as ever there was. It isn't likely I would want to go on working for old Mason for ever, is it? Maybe 'tis good enough for Fred, but I have got a bit more spunk, thank Gawd! And I have had enough of dad's grumbles, what is more. He forgets he en't no more my dad nor no one else is, when you come to it. 'Tis enough to make any chap 'list, having an old-fashioned feller like him at'n all day."

"You didn't ought to speak so!" said Liddy spiritedly. "Besides, it en't true, and you knows it. Dad is the smartest man in the place. You en't the one to pass remarks about he."

"Well, I have had a bellyful of it, ah! and to spare," Tom declared with obstinate sulkiness.

"You will be having to put up with things as will seem a deal more old-fashioned, as a soljer, nor ever you have had to here," Liddy answered. "Now, Fred, off you go. Don't sit there staring at me like you was a natural!"

Poor Fred! No one considered his point of view. While he sat apathetically listening to the ebb and flow of recriminations something in his mind kept repeating, "She has gone!" with unfriendly insistence, like one knocking at a sick man's door to remind him of his

mortality. What did he care if Tom had enlisted? What did he care about anything except the news of Sally? And of that there was little more than a bald statement, when he wanted abundance of detail with which to feed his mortifying fancies. Yet he was too sensitive to divert the course of the conversation towards himself by questioning Tom. He was, indeed, in a way grateful for the fact that it had swept past without, so to speak, more than wetting him with a few chance splashes. . . . But Liddy was right; he must command himself, and, without sympathy or enlightenment, set off for the day's work. He was very late. After all, he would have time, only too much time, to think while he was at work.

When he had left the cottage, Liddy, ignoring Tom's writhings in the womb of Fate, rolled up her sleeves, baring her firm round arms, and prepared for the business of the day.

- "Now then, Tom, just hand me my scuffler off the door and then you had best help me make the beds, if you en't going to work."
- "I have got to go back to Pricehurst almost at once," Tom answered, obediently rising and fetching his sister's sacking apron. "You don't sim to think I'm really going."
 - "What are you off so soon for?"
 - "I got to go."
- "Don't tell me! You are afraid of telling dad; that's how 'tis," Liddy declared, looking at him with

clear, direct eyes, above a mouth curved in half-kindly, half-scornful amusement. "Well, don't help me if you don't want to! I dessay I shall do better without you."

She went resolutely up the stairs, and, before long, could be heard, capable and strong, clapping pillows and bolsters into shape, turning mattresses, and giving each bed, when finally made, a smart, definite thump of approval. Tom had been almost equally dejected and depressed by the growing realization of the irrevocable quality of his act the previous evening, but this decidedly offhand treatment by Liddy fired him with a defiant spirit.

"Liddy, I'm off!" he called up the stairs, bringing her to him on nimble feet that pattered down the stairs with the speed of a woodpecker's bill on a tree trunk.

"So you are really going, then?" she asked, with large-eyed sincerity.

"Yes, Lid. 'Tis hard to think I shan't be here when you be married."

"Well, good-bye, Tom. I didn't mean to be hasty, but you ought to think of dad more than what you do. What he will say I can't think! "Twill put him out terrible. Still, we shall be seeing you over here later, I dessay, smart as a jay in your uniform."

"I don't know so much about that," Tom answered dolefully. "They are sending me off somewhere, they say."

"Well, you can scratch a line now and again."

- "I'll do that, Lid," Tom's voice quavered.
- "Well, I am sure I hope you will face the enemy better nor you face dad," Liddy retorted unexpectedly.
- "Maybe you will be sorry if I am killed," Tom answered reproachfully, unable to rise from the slough of sentimentality with Liddy's agility.
- "Get along with you; the war is over. Even if 'tweren't, the Bowers would think you was a scare-crow."
- "Don't you be too sure," Tom warned her. "Maybe you will be sorry one of these days."

She watched him pass down the street carrying a small bundle of treasured possessions; and, as she watched, her face belied the mockery of her words.

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THIRD PART (1902)

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As the autumn passed, and early winter with its gales and rains stripped from the trees their yellowing leaves, the roofs and chimneys of the new Fidding became increasingly visible from the rise on which the Garretts' cottage stood among a handful of unregenerate dwellings, that, clustering about the church, still resisted the tide of change. And in that unkindly season, those older houses, with their tiled or thatched roofs and weathered serenity, seemed more gracious and appealing by contrast with their more efficient rivals, which stood bleak and blatant, their crude outlines no longer softened by the mist of hedgerows and the mantles of trees. In those stubborn survivors of a changing order there still lived men and women whose lives were bound to the land, a dwindling but resolute colony that struggled to ignore the forces militating against it, although long since conscious that defeat was unavoidable.

The land itself, and the two farms that ministered to it, showed no sign of change. When once the village had been left, the ancient routine of the countryside could be seen proceeding unhurriedly and apparently inevitably. From Lads' Lane Farm came the shrill whir of the threshing-machine, from which a scarf of smoke could be seen trailing jauntily through the washed air. Across the fields moved the ploughs, breaking up the stubble of a gathered harvest. and there traveled slowly, with creaking axles, the cart from which manure was being forked into heaps for spreading on the fields. And even as the year seemed to reach the stagnation of final death, there began to appear, delicate and pale, the first delicious shoots of early beans and wheat, frail champions of the recurring cycle. Through all the winter months the work went on, unobtrusively, unbaffled for long even by the most tempestuous weather. For a day or two, perhaps, the hands would be driven to adopt makeshift jobs, clean harness or whitewash cow-sheds, but with the first lull in downpour, the first relenting of frost, the hum of the threshing-machine would drone out again, ploughs would be harnessed to their teams, and cows and ewes would appear upon the hay stubble.

But while thus the year renewed itself, Bob Garrett, who shared no such heritage of recurring youth, was slowly and irrefutably slipping back down the slopes he had so toilfully and courageously mounted. It had become pitifully evident, even to his own reluctant eyes, that the deterioration in his standard of achievement was no fortuitous and transient result of tran-

sient influences. His hand, cunning with the desperate cunning of age, was yet unable to achieve what once it had achieved almost without conscious effort. Hoping that the skill of long experience might be made to compensate for failing strength and failing sight, he resorted to artifices that were alien from his nature, repugnant, and in the end unavailing. Behind assumed indifference, he knew that the day was over for unquestioning reliance on his skill in all the delicate arts of his calling. The rheumatism that distorted his hands and bowed his back was, in a way, almost a welcome ill, providing him as it did with a purely physical and extraneous handicap to which he could bow without reflection upon the cunning that it arrested.

Kindly dissimulated, as Bob's fall had been by his employer, it was a bitter fact. No longer did he lead his team, the quickest, most highly skilled ploughman in the valley. He still received his old wages, was given to understand, indeed, that at some indefinite date he would resume his old work; but, actually, he was employed upon tasks that were tasks for his inferiors. Sick at heart, he suppressed his bitterness, applying all the accumulated skill of his long life to his ignoble occupations, so that each bit of work that he undertook, even if it were merely the cleaning of horse harness, became a little masterpiece imbued with some touch of individuality, the impress of his proud old hands and mind.

156 SHEPHERD'S WARNING

Bob's place as head ploughman at Bentwood Farm had been taken by Fred, who, although under twentyone years of age, was nevertheless the most skilful of the vounger hands. The identity of his successor was a matter of some consolation to Bob. He inclined towards the grandson who thus had justified the efforts that had been expended upon him. Fred, for his part, bore himself with a modest forbearance that scarcely was meritorious, for it was merely the spontaneous expression of natural diffidence. To some young men in his position, his grandfather's rather insistent advice and exhortation would have been irritating. Fred, however, accepted everything with quiet good-nature, listened patiently and a trifle humbly to the old man's declarations that, handy as Fred was becoming, he would never equal his grandfather's skill in earlier years.

Fred and his grandfather passed that winter alone in the cottage; for, two months after Tom had enlisted with such suddenness, Liddy and George Vines, taking advantage of the death of old Isaac Begood and the removal of his widow to her married daughter's house at Sending, had married without delay and settled in the Begoods' vacant cottage, little more than a hundred yards from Bob. Much as he missed Liddy, Bob had not yet reached the age at which unconscious self-interest becomes supreme, and after her marriage he watched with kindly interest the hesitating gravitation of Fred towards Grace Pertwood, who remained with

her mother in the cottage where her father, the shepherd, had died two years before.

II

Grace Pertwood, a voluble, rather empty-headed girl of twenty, had made the first overtures in the relationship between herself and Fred, a relationship that still poised indecisively between friendliness and The opportunity had come to her one evening during the previous September, when she was industriously transplanting some dahlias from the side borders in her mother's little front garden to a circular bed in front of the cottage door. Fred on his way home had seen her at work, and, little inclined for dalliance with girls, being still raw from the wound Sally had inflicted upon him, all the same had been unable to avoid remonstrating against an act of such transparent stupidity, perpetrated by one who should have had, at any rate, some superficial knowledge of the proprieties of gardening.

"Why, Grace!" he exclaimed, stopping before the cottage, "whatever do you think you are at there?"

"These poor things do get no sun to speak of, away in the corner they come from; so I thought I would put them somewhere a bit kinder," Grace answered, giggling.

"You mid as well cast them on the muck-heap as

go dragging the poor things about, at this time of year. I wonder you en't got more sense."

"Well, I thought I could but try, as they say, and 'twon't be much loss if they do die," Grace explained.

"That en't the way to see to your garden," Fred expostulated. "'Twas your own fault for putting them in a bad place at starting. You can't make a garden ship-shape by pulling it about same as if 'twas your hair, Grace, and that is true enough."

Fred's little personal allusion, devoid though it was of any personal appeal, at once made Grace realize her femininity. With a hand instinctively rising to touch her hair in tentative correction, she smiled meltingly at Fred, who was absorbed in painful criticism of her garden.

"You see, I am not much of a hand at gardening," she said, with a winning air of confidential confession.

"There en't no need for you to tell me that," Fred answered bluntly.

He went home, and forgot the incident. But Grace, suddenly aware of his desirable qualities, turned the trivial conversation over and over in her mind, seeking, and interpolating where she did not find them, subtle implications of tone and glance, as an optimistic bargain-hunter persuades himself of the Caroline character of transparent Brummagem. She turned her attention seriously to gardening, especially at those hours when Fred usually returned from work, and set out to help Luke Medlar, who of recent years had exploited

himself as a jobbing gardener, and had less time, therefore, to give to his own plot. As the result of her manœuvers it was not long before Grace succeeded in extracting an offer of help in her garden from the good-natured, and already overworked, Fred. Having done so, she worked him hard. But Fred did not question her sincerity, and Grace, with inherited subtlety of sex, did not fail to soften the ugly outlines of her attitude by skilful use of all the allurements and physical provocations with which she was endowed. She was rewarded by the consciousness that Fred had ceased to regard her merely as an impersonal blunderer at his beloved gardening, and realized that she was a girl with an existence apart from that of her flowers and bulbs.

Grace, indeed, was not without attractions, and, if not actually beautiful, possessed attributes that in Fidding were of more value to her than coldly irreproachable features. She was a round-about, plump little thing, with soft brown hair, lively eyes and a slightly metallic glitter of spirits that, in small doses, passed for sunny good-nature. That effervescence was a rather ingenuous dissimulation, designed to conceal a keen appreciation of her own interests. She threw out, as it were, a glamour of cordiality and sympathy, which, however, could be pierced by any eyes of ordinary keenness, to reveal an innocent but entirely selfcentred purpose. During that winter, the purpose that eclipsed and outweighed all the normal petty

chicaneries of her life was the appropriation of Fred, and her resolution to achieve it was fortified not only by an intuition that old Bob was on her side, but by the downright advocacy of her mother.

To the latter, Grace's desire to marry Fred had the double attraction of keeping her last remaining child near her—for all the others had strayed to the town or farther afield—and at the same time providing herself with a respectable son-in-law. Never surely was maiden's desire more hallowed! Grace felt that her pursuit of Fred was almost a matter of duty. In future years, no doubt, her adaptable mind would readily convince her that she had actually sacrificed herself upon the altar of her mother's wishes.

Grace stalked her quarry, therefore, with increasing eagerness, and her pursuit was, after all, a legitimate one. Her only motive was self-gratification, and that, when all is said, is the motive of almost all lovers. Fidding, which did not concern itself with the finer shades of conduct and motive, was on the whole of the opinion that Fred was lucky. His delay in plucking the fruit, so temptingly, so blandishingly offered to him, indeed, was considered astonishing, even in one whose actions and words had always been peculiar. But Fred, if peculiar, was human, and he would have been inhuman if he had entirely failed to respond to the overtures of a superabundantly attractive girl, who, in a dozen discreet ways, gave him to understand that, eyes, lips, body, and soul, she was his for the asking—

provided that the "asking" took place in church, as maiden modesty required. It happened, therefore, that by the New Year Fred had advanced from helping Grace in the garden (which, indeed, needed little assistance at that season) to throwing forward outposts in a friendly country, had asked and obtained leave to take Grace for a walk now and again. There was, however, still a subtle qualification in the position. Fred walked with Grace, but he did not walk "out" with her: his position, in fact, was not irrevocable. He sniffed the bait, but as yet had not sprung the trap. He was, indeed, moved but not yet infatuated. Grace talked with animation when they were together, and he responded freely enough; but there was something lacking in their relationship. On his side there was a critical detachment that enabled him to realize how effectually the shadow of the old days with Sally still chilled him, how lacking in the old magic was the new intrigue. It is poor sport fishing previously unmolested waters with succulent worms, poor sport netting foredoomed trout. It was also poor sport for Fred to have Grace's lips inflicted upon him, instead of . yielded after deft play and interplay.

Fred did not reason in this way; he was not clearly sensible even of Grace's eager submission. In fact, with his grandfather and even Liddy showering warm approval on the object of his tentative endeavors, he felt that what he believed to be clear-sight on his part might perhaps be, in fact, blindness. After receiving

veiled but ardent encouragement from his sister, he would eye Grace with concentrated judgment, as if endeavoring to penetrate obscuring mists of bias, and Grace's rich attractions, her superficial sweetness of manner, and happy contentment, would convince him for a time that he had been prejudiced.

"Hullo, Fred," she would say, with rosy cheeks, when Fred appeared on one of these visits of critical inspection, "what has brought you here, I wonder!"

"I was wondering if you would be feeling like a stroll, seeing as it is such a nice evening," Fred would answer, taking advantage of suddenly found desire for her company to overcome the difficulty of explaining his motive.

"So it be," Grace would agree, and then, instinctively avoiding any semblance of cheapening herself, "I don't hardly think I can come to-night."

"Why not? There is nothing to stop you, is there?"

"That is all you know, Fred. I can't only think of myself. There's poor mother; I can't go and leave her to do everything, without hardly any warning. It en't fair only to do as you likes yourself."

This simple pantomime would run through its appointed acts, until it reached the *finale*, when Grace, with diffident apology, would retire to see to her mother in the kitchen.

"I don't hardly like to leave you, mother dear," Fred would hear the lines run.

"Oh, don't you bother about me, Gracie; I shall

manish. 'Twill do you good to get out for a spell.'Tis seldom enough you give a thought to yourself, my dear, you are that unselfish."

Then Grace and Fred would walk with pleasant leisureliness along the Belhanger Road, until they reached the entrance to the little wood. There, by an old unhinged wooden gate, about which the grasses sprang luxuriantly and almost untroubled, Grace would pause.

- "'Ten't so cold for the time of year. Shall we rest here for a spell? There's no such terrible, desperate hurry, is there?"
 - "You jump up on that old stile," Fred would say.
- "You will have to give me a hand, he is too high for poor me!"

Then, with gratified but modest giggles, Grace would yield herself to Fred, and be hoisted on to her perch, there to make a careful disposition of skirts over chubby and obtrusive legs. But at this point, for Grace the culmination of the whole episode, Fred, as likely as not, would become apathetic and detached. However much Grace languished or invited, she would win from him nothing more than tepid affability.

By the end of the year, Grace, although not certain of her footing, had advanced far enough to make slight assumptions of authority. She was always antagonistic to old Luke Medlar, and disliked Fred's constant association with him.

"If you want to please me, you will have less to do

164 SHEPHERD'S WARNING

with that dirty, ill-natured old man," she said several times.

Fred, however, apart from any other consideration, was not sure if he did particularly want to please her, and took no notice of her request. The result was that Grace, tentatively encroaching upon his freedom of action, began to say, "Now don't let me see you running off after that old Luke to-morrow, mind!"

"What has he done to you, as you should be so set against him?" Fred would ask, unconsciously revealing his knowledge that her motives were usually personal.

"He en't done nothing as I knows of; but he is not the kind of friend for a chap like you."

"Why not? He's bin good to me, and done a lot for me, one way and another, ever since I was a youngster."

"That may be, but he's too old, and everybody knows as he's a *nasty* old man. Besides, I don't see why you should always be wanting to be with *him*."

"Well, you see, Grace, I like him," Fred would answer seriously, unconscious of her artless jealousy.

"I am sure there is no need to tell me you like him; 'tis plain enough to anybody as has eyes in their head."

This prejudice of Grace's against Luke was really due to an acute perception that the old man was not well disposed towards herself. Careless of her opinion, or of her feelings, he showed it plainly enough, not only by slighting criticisms nicely calculated to be audible to her when she passed him, but also by more subtle means, glances, assumed unconsciousness of her presence, even by expectorations that possessed some disparaging quality. She feared that, sooner or later, he would use his influence over Fred to wean the latter's weakling affections from her, and her fear was justified.

"I don't know, I'm sure, what you want to be hanging round that Grace Pertwood for," Luke said angrily, one day when Fred was helping him to sweep the churchyard path. "She en't going to make you a good wife, if that is what you are after her for."

"Ah, you don't like her?" Fred asked, well aware of the fact, but hoping that his question might encourage the old man to talk about a subject of so much interest.

"It en't that I don't like her, so much as that I see through her. She's a sly baggage, that is what she is. I knowed it all along. 'Twas the same when she were a nipper. She was the one for Sunday-school, she was! The way she would hang around after 'twas over, waiting to show what a proper little masterpiece she was. There! 'twas enough to make your hand itch to smack her. Nasty little gal she was; that sanctimonious you'd ha' thought 'twas a wonder she didn't sicken through being so holy, to look at her. And all the time she'd be brivetting about on the sly with any good-for-nothing young rascals she could get

hold on. Letting herself out to be such a pattern and no better nor nobody else when you come to know! 'Tis the same now. You would think, to hear her speak, she hadn't scarcely an idea in her head except for her old ma, whereas she is scheming for herself night and day."

"It seems to me she is a nice enough maid in herself, say what you may, Luke. There is my old dad, and Liddy—what's sharp as you please—like her well enough."

"'Tain't my fault if they are took in, is it?" Luke inquired, propping his hands on his heath-broom, and fixing Fred with his watery eyes. "If you ask me, you would ha' done better with that Sally Dean as you was running after last summer."

"Who has bin telling you that?" Fred asked self-consciously.

"Never mind who's bin telling me. 'Tis a fact. And what is more, you might have done worse nor with she. I en't one to think the worse of her because she was unfortunate in her parents. She were a proper little handful of nettles, I grant you, and I don't say she weren't no better nor she might have been. But she had some spirit, not like one of these here pumpkin sort, like that Grace. She were better matched to you, if you ask me. Still, she en't here; so that's an end on it. And I s'pose you did ought to marry, along of your old dad. "Ten't right Liddy having to mind him as well as her own chap, and she will be having a new-

comer to look after before long, or my eyes en't what they was."

Luke was always garrulous, but his garrulity was not a mere vapid effervescence; there was usually a good deal of sense in what he said. Fred, while he finished sweeping, and afterwards while he walked home, weighed the old man's words in his mind, affecting to disregard them with amused tolerance, yet all the time prejudiced by them, the more because they expressed his own previously inarticulate feelings.

III

The New Year found Bob Garrett facing the world with renewed optimism. Gradually he had been adapting himself to the new conditions of his life, finding, as he did so, that the outlook which at first had seemed so sombre, was relieved by faint but unmistakable nuances of brightness. He ceased to brood in silent dismay over the persistent inroads of his rheumatics, and with characteristic courage began to treat the matter humorously, referring to his "old bones" and comparing his warped fingers to bunches of dead twigs which would make handy little fire-lighters. It was as if his indomitable spirit, frozen by the rigors of an inclement winter, at prospect of the spring was breaking from some icy prison in which it had been incarcerated. He moved about with a twinkle rekin-

dled in his eyes, his slow, soft voice again enriched with mellow appreciation of life.

But Destiny was only giving him a pause for recuperation. While his bruised spirit was still only convalescent, she struck him again. It was as if he were a novice playing at cards with an expert, who trumped offhand the court cards he played with such inept optimism. One morning, while he was at work remaking a broken hedge, he saw Mason, the farmer who employed him, approaching across the field. Bob, who had nothing to fear from the quality of his work, welcomed these occasional visits of inspection, which brought with them not only an intelligent appreciation of his work, but also a few minutes' pleasant conversation to relieve the long loneliness of days spent, more often than not, out of touch with all his fellow-workers.

"'Tis a bit sharpish this morning, sir," he said in greeting, standing up and straightening his back.

"Yes, it is," the farmer agreed. "Still, we mustn't complain. 'Tis not enough to hold up the drilling, and we don't want things to be coming on too fast."

"That is true enough. Well, I have about made a job of this here fence, sir. Not but what he wanted some looking to. 'Tis wonderful the way he've gone; you couldn't hardly have believed 'twas possible. Still, of course, he ought to have bin seen to before. The always the way; if you put off doing a thing to

save time one day, you have to waste twice as much labor over him another day. These fences when they gets old is a reg'lar noosance. They runs all to head. Still, you can't hardly expect them to stop growing to please you. They must change, same as everything else do."

"That reminds me of something I wished to say to you, Garrett. There are going to be changes at Bentwood."

"Ah?"

Bob was deeply interested; his mind ran over the possible objects of the changes, appraising the stock, conjecturing alterations to the farm buildings.

- "The fact is, the estate has been sold. It has been bought by a Mr. Halsey: you may have heard of him—he comes from Pricehurst."
- "Will that be the one as has the brewery? Got a fancy for horse-breeding, so I have heard."
- "That is the one. He is going to breed horses here. He has bought Bentwood, and Lads' Lane, and all the rest of Mr. Pembridge's land in the valley. He is going to live at Bentwood."
 - "Oh, dear! That will mean you'll be leaving?"
- "Yes, I'm leaving. I dare say I could have stopped on for a time. But—well, farming isn't what 'twas hereabouts. 'Tis dairy-farming or nothing, and I have no notion of becoming a dairyman at my time of life. I'd rather have done with it."
 - "I am sorry to hear that, sir. But what will he be

wanting all that land for? He en't surely going to put it all down for pasture?"

- "He will keep some in plough, I dare say, and I hear he is thinking of building on a strip along by the road."
- "More houses! Oh, dear! And the wrong sort, I'll lay. We could have done with a few cottages, but it en't likely he will be thinking of building they."
- "No, 'tis places for Pricehurst folk he has in mind, I understand."
- "Well, I am sorry, sir. It won't sim the same without you after all these years. Still, it won't be the fust new master I have had, and I must make the best of it, I s'pose."
- "That is just the point, Garrett; I hardly know what he will be doing for hands. I can't say for sure that he will be wanting you, though I will do what I can for you. Still, in any case, you mustn't expect what I have been giving you."

Bob's expression became dismayed.

"He en't surely going to turn me off, after all the years as I have worked here? Why, man and boy, I have bin here sixty years if a day, and there en't never bin no complaint of how I done my work. I en't so young as I was, maybe, but I en't useless yet, I reckon," he said bitterly, his china-blue eyes clouding with distress.

The farmer knew well enough that Bob was far from being useless, even if his abilities were more re-

stricted than he realized. But, as he stood there, querulously defiant, with mumbling lips and puckered eyes, he looked, superficially, merely the ruin of a man.

"I will say what I can for you, you may depend on that," the farmer repeated. "But you must remember that the time you have been here is not likely to bear so much weight with a newcomer as it does with me. However, I dare say he will find something for you to do."

With a friendly nod the farmer walked off, leaving the old man to digest the news.

"Tain't likely he'd turn me off," Bob assured himself two or three times, and then, as he drove a guiding peg into the ground with a clever twist of his wrist, he said aloud, "Going to breed horses, is he?" as if trying the audible effect of a distrusted idea. Turning the matter over in his mind, he worked on steadily, but the interest of his work had gone: the little contrivances and shifts, which his skill called to his aid at every turn, ceased to give him a comfortable satisfaction. His work was as cunning as before, but its cunning was lifeless. All the keen savor had departed from the day and from its task. He was no longer a craftsman, imbuing a humble operation with the intimate stamp of his personality, but a skilled workman pursuing his calling with cold capability.

That evening, on his way home, Bob saw Liddy taking in some washing from her little garden, and stopped to tell her the news that had become an increasingly heavy burden during the long hours of the day.

"You mustn't fret yourself, dad," Liddy said reassuringly, when the tale was told. "'Ten't you they will be turning off, but some of these youngsters. This Mr. Halsey en't likely to send the smartest man on the farm packing."

"Maybe I was smart enough once, Lid," her grandfather answered. "But I am getting old, and there en't no use for old chaps, nowadays. 'Twas different once. There was my old uncle, Mark, as shepherded till he was pretty near ninety. 'Tis all young chaps as they is after now."

"You see, 'twill be how I tell you," Liddy persisted.
"I wonders how 'twill affect my George," she added, having refrained from expressing her own anxiety until she had reassured her grandfather.

"He won't hurt," Bob answered with conviction.
"He's all right, he is. Why, en't he a horseman?
He is just the chap they will be wanting."

"Well, I am glad you think so, dad, and I dare say you are right. 'Tis like enough there won't be such wonderful changes, after all. Maybe 'twill be pretty near the same as it always has bin."

"'Twon't never be that," her grandfather asserted bitterly. "'Tis nothing but change, nor never will be. 'Tis all along of the town. There was some as thought these new houses would be a good thing. But I knew all along how 'twould be: 'tis get on or go out. They have no use for the likes of us. Why, you'd hardly know the place. Where is all the old lot? There en't hardly any left, what with some dying, and others clearing out. And here's Mrs. Clarke saying only yesterday as she was packing before many weeks is out—off to her sister over to Sussex. I scarce wonder. You can't hardly put your nose out of the door without there's someone looking at your house, as much as to say, 'If only that old gentleman would make hisself scarce his house would suit me nicely over the week-ends.' And they en't satisfied with taking the place from you. They are after your jobs now. 'Tis enough to dishearten you. It wouldn't surprise me if they was to turn Fred off, too."

"Well, Fred is young and can shift for himself," Liddy answered. "Still, you don't know yet as they are going to turn anybody off, dad. You have got the hump, that's what is wrong with you."

"You would think I weren't no good at all," the old man persisted peevishly. "I may be getting on, but I en't only fit for the muck-heap yet, and I knows it."

"You come along in with me, and have a cup of tea," Liddy suggested. "'Twill cheer you up, like. You will see things different with a cup of hot tea in you."

"I will get along home, Liddy, thank you kindly. Maybe I got the hump, like you say."

"Well, there is no call for you to worry. If it comes to that, you can always live along of we. You

174 SHEPHERD'S WARNING

would be so snug you wouldn't hardly know your-self!"

"'Twon't never come to that, I hope," her grand-father answered, and with reviving animation, added, "I en't going to leave my little old house not for nobody. 'Tis my own. They can't take he. I'd starve, sooner."

He frowned angrily, as if repelling the onslaughts of enemies envious of his well-being, and then, with a sudden simple-minded transition, said, "They crocuses of yours is wonderful spronky little chaps. 'Tis a sight for sore eyes to see them so nice and forward. You tell your George they be a regular *credit* to him."

The mellowing influence of his appreciation of those young shoots, so sturdy and dauntless, remained with him while he trudged home down the village street, an insignificant figure, soiled with labor and bowed with years, which would have received no more than a transient, distasteful glance from those whose intrusion upon Fidding had so intimate an effect upon his life.

IV

Luke Medlar, who soon heard of the impending changes at Bentwood Farm, hailed Fred a few days later, as the latter passed on his way to work.

"I want a word with you, Fred," he said. "Just step into my kitchen, will you?"

"I haven't the time just now," Fred answered. "Twould make me late, and I don't want to give them nothing to complain of just now. Any other time, I would, gladly."

"You come in, as I tell you," Luke ordered him severely. "What do I care if it do make you late! What I have got to say won't wait, and you will have no call to worry if it do make you late."

Lured into his old friend's earthy kitchen, that each year became more like a mere annex to the garden, Fred was presented with a scheme of great subtlety and good-nature. Luke, it seemed, having revolved things in his mind for some time, had come to the conclusion that without much trouble he could build up a very pretty connection as jobbing gardener among the newcomers at Fidding. Already he had made considerable progress, undertaking far more work than his age would allow him to carry out, and staving off the inevitable criticism of results with resourceful For some time, indeed, he had bent the plausibility. pliable Fred to his ends, getting him to help with the routine work of the churchyard and of his own garden, while occupied himself on more remunerative jobs. For a long time he had been thinking of taking Fred into partnership, urged to do so by good-nature and a reproachful if largely dragooned conscience, but, at the same time, deterred by an increasing distaste for allowing anyone else to enter what he considered his preserves. These preserves, however, were already being poached by others, and his reluctance to yield, already shaken by that fact, was finally overcome by his good-nature on hearing the news that made Fred's position at the farm uncertain. Having finally come to a decision, he sketched in the prospects for Fred and himself with a generously wielded brush.

"'Tis bound to do you more good than working all your days as a ploughman," he explained. "Who ever heard of a ploughman as come to anything but the Union? A jobbing gardener, now, more often than not, becomes a nurseryman before long."

"I don't need any persuading," Fred assured him. "What I am thinking is I may be a drag on you. Besides, how would I set to work?"

"You won't be no drag," Luke answered truthfully enough. "As for setting to work, that's easy. I shall just say as I am a bit busy-like myself, but I knows a young man as I can recommend. They will be glad enough to get you, when I tells them I can speak for you. Why, before long you won't be wondering how to set about getting work, you will be wondering which jobs to turn away."

Luke's skilful introduction of the word "recommend" attained its object with ridiculous ease. Fred, who was too empirical a dreamer ever deeply to speculate upon his own capabilities or worth, was overcome by honest gratitude.

"'Tis wonderful good of you, Luke," he exclaimed. "There en't many, I lay, that would go out of their

way to give a chap like me such a start. You always bin a good friend to me, and I am not likely to forget it; it may be that one of these days I will be able to give a bit of help to you when you need it yourself."

"Ah, there is no call to be in such a hurry," Luke grunted sourly. "Don't be in such a hurry to start packing me on the shelf. You be trying to step into my shoes too soon."

After moodily accepting Fred's protesting explanations, Luke considered that his position as benefactor was so secured that he might afford a little more truth without danger.

"You needn't run away with the idea that you are a beggar I am giving a few ha'pence to," he said. dare say 'twill do me as much good as you. 'Tain't as if you had not got your head screwed on the right way; you have always bin able to see what isn't there. That is a gift, and I don't mind saying 'tis more than I can do. I can think to myself that a clump of delphiniums. or maybe a bush of anchusa, would make a nice show in this or that spot. But you can see it all aforehand, and have a hull border blooming in your mind afore you make it. Now, these folk as I work for, they wants someone to make up their minds for'n. says, 'Oh, gardener, I s'pose 'tis no use asking you for ideas. You'll say geraniums, or lobelias, or calceolarevs.' Making game of yer! I have half a mind to tell some of them as they can't expect nothing different, if they has these here bricklayers' clerks from the town to work for'n. But it en't no use to deny as I am hard put to it sometimes to know what to suggest. They talk big, but they don't know what they want! Half of them don't know no more about flowers nor my old cat do. 'Twill come handy to you. . . . They all have their notions. There is Miss Conder, she wants a herbaceous border in a garden the size of the seat of your pants, and mostly broken brick. There is others want a hull market-garden of sauce out of next to nothing. And old Thompson, he wants one of these landskip gardens in his back-yard."

While Luke garrulously initiated his disciple into the ritual of his proposed calling, Fred's thoughts, wandering on a lead, made him realize that the scheme was a He would never have thought of it for good one. himself, but when once it was suggested to him, he could see clearly enough that there was plenty of work for jobbing gardeners in Fidding. A man who knew his work would have little serious competition, for his rivals, almost without exception, would be men who. without much knowledge of gardening, attempted to earn a few extra shillings after working during the day either on the railway or in the quarry that had been opened between the village and Sending. Even if more serious competition sprang up, as no doubt it eventually would, there were already gardens enough, large and small, to keep a number of men fully employed, and the number of houses was constantly increasing. As for Fred himself, he would work with Luke for a few years; and then, what was to prevent him getting a good place as whole-time gardener at one of the large houses on the hill? The idea flitted through his mind, insubstantial and tantalizing. Securing it, as one secures a moth that may or may not prove to be a rarity, he pigeon-holed it for leisurely examination when he could better foresee how things were likely to go.

The result of the interview with Luke was that, after assumed deliberation. Fred decided to give up his work at the farm without delay. This decision was a passport to tranquillity. The prospects of his grandfather and of himself ceased to make him uneasy, and, with new-born optimism that fortified him against discouragement, he announced his intention to the few people who were interested in his fortunes. His grandfather, who was, in reality, most closely concerned after Fred himself, accepted the idea with grudging approval. He did not like it, mind, but after all it was about time somebody in Fidding got a bit of good out of all these new folk. Liddy was inevitably encouraging. Would she not have encouraged anything to which Fred set his hand? "You won't come to harm, not with old Luke," she declared. "He has not bin feathering his nest all these years for nothing. Why, you are as good as set up, Fred; there is nothing more for you to do beyond get a wife!" That kindly meant innuendo disturbed Fred. He knew well enough

what Grace would say, and mentally cringed before her, even though she had as yet no recognized authority over him. He set off to tell her, as confident of a distressing interview as a man about to meet his creditors.

The interview fulfilled his forebodings. could not think how he could go and get mixed up with Luke Medlar. She didn't care if it was a good chance for Fred. What was more, she knew, with the infallible intuition of Grace Pertwood, that it was not a good chance, would, in fact, be a cause for lifelong regret to one who would wish he had only had enough sense to listen to her in time. But then, why should he listen to her? It was no business of hers. thanked him, indeed, for his civility in going out of his way to tell her his plans; but, after all, they were his own plans, not hers. With it all, she was very affable and cov: the offhand toss of the head that accompanied her repudiation of any right to share his counsels was itself graceful. But her attitude bruised Fred's sensitive nature more than would bludgeon He felt all the time that he was being indicted: that, obviously, it was for him, then and there, to give her the right to influence him. He felt a hot criminality, as if he had gravely compromised the girl, and refused reparation from sordid motives that militated against his better nature. If Grace had been a little less voluble, indeed, she might have achieved her purpose. But the torrent of her words drowned Fred's

struggling resolutions. He left nothing behind him but apologetic deprecations of his conduct, and went home too distressed even to ask himself why Grace was so prejudiced against Luke. Grace herself, who had yielded to an unwise impulse to show Fred that he was nothing to her, an impulse springing from piqued desire, did not realize that her artless attempt to enhance her value in Fred's eyes had scared still more the shy creature she intended to decoy.

V

Owing to the change of policy at the farm, much of the work there was at a standstill. Fred, therefore, had no difficulty in leaving. His change of occupation was not a very hazardous enterprise, although such a change was new to him. The majority of farm workers have at their command skill in a dozen callings, and those who are not regular hands may work first with one farmer in one capacity, then elsewhere in another. This mobile skill is their capital, readily realizable, and it enables them to face the loss of a job with far less trepidation than can the majority of workers in higher grades of life.

It was not long before Fred settled down as unofficial partner of old Luke. He enjoyed the work, and found plenty to do at a time when all gardens were being prepared for the coming summer. But at first,

he suffered from an excessive deference and fear of obtrusiveness, for he was not one to perceive very readily the fact that most people, in spite of blustering dissimulation, regard their gardeners with ingenuous veneration and awe. Even when time inured him to his new calling, he would never be able to assume that aggressive obsequiousness which made some of Luke's employers hide discarded cigarette ends in leafy coigns, guiltily, fearful of his anger should they meet his eve on border or path. Within a month, Fred's weekly earnings equaled his former wage as ploughman; and Luke, although he admitted that the amount of work varied with the season, declared that before long there should be little difficulty in earning anything up to twenty-five or thirty shillings in a busy week. were, moreover, he hinted, inscrutably, certain occult practices by which this figure could be so increased as to compensate for the pinch of the winter months.

This enchanting prospect compensated Fred for the knowledge, which soon came to him, that before long he would have to bear an increased proportion of the joint expenses of his grandfather and himself. A few weeks after the former was told that the farm was going to change hands, the new owner visited it, and after consultation with Mason, interviewed Bob himself in the rickyard where he was working. After he had been asked a few questions, and a comprehending glance had traveled over his attenuated and agueracked body, Bob had been told that he would be en-

gaged as a general laborer at ten shillings a week. He had been inclined to contest both the wages and the nature of employment, but Mason wisely silenced him, and he had to make the best of it. It was an acrid draught. One protest only he made.

"I never thought 'twould come to that," he said. "I have bin ploughman for fifty years, even though, maybe, I have not led a team so much of late. My old dad, he was ploughman till hes death, and no one never made he a general hand. General hand! Why, sims I am to be put back where I was as a lad!"

"Well, you can take it or leave it," said his new employer good-naturedly. "If you think you can better yourself, there is nothing to stop you going. But you must remember, old gentleman, that you are getting on in years."

"Ah!" Bob assented bitterly. "Anyone would think 'twas a crime to grow oldish."

It was, indeed, a bitter draught. He would receive eight shillings less wage, and be stripped of the last tatters of his dignity and self-esteem. It meant more than that; he was not only to be stripped, but his wincing flesh branded with his downfall. It was one thing to be a ploughman who seldom, or more accurately, never, ploughed, another to be set among the least skilled class of workers. He pulled at his bony, white-bristled chin with forefinger and thumb. Well, he would have to make the best of it. But, in spite of that philosophic resolution, Fred and Liddy both had

to minister assiduously to his injured pride. And Fred had to find eight shillings a week to replenish the reduced exchequer, while Liddy voluntarily undertook much of the work in her grandfather's cottage as well as her own.

Fred managed well enough, however; well enough, indeed, to be able to support the home not only when all went smoothly, but even when, as recently had happened with increasing frequency, his grandfather's earning powers were temporarily suspended by lumbago or sciatica.

Fred, therefore, was not very greatly concerned when, early in March, his grandfather was kept at home for some days by a severe onslaught of lumbago, which made it impossible for the old man even to dress without help. Nor was Bob himself much distressed at first, but spent two or three days lying comfortably on a couple of chairs in the kitchen, smoking, dreaming, and watching with interest when Liddy, who came over from her cottage from time to time, busied herself in cleaning up the kitchen, or washing a few clothes in the big red earthenware pan. But Bob was not built for idleness; he had not been bred to regard work as an irksome necessity, to be avoided on the first excuse. To him, work was synonymous with life. As soon as his incapacitation became less marked, therefore, he became restless, hobbled gingerly to the door with the help of his stick, and looked up and down the street with longing eyes. Before long Fred,

who acted as his grandfather's medical adviser, decided, after consultation with Liddy, that the old man would be better at work than fretting at home.

"Well, dad," he said one morning, "I think if I give you a good doing with turps to-night last thing, there's no reason why you shouldn't be back to work to-morrow, if you feel up to it when the time comes."

"I shall be up to it, right enough," his grandfather declared. "But, oh! my poor old back. You and your turps have pretty near taken all hes skin off. Your hand is as heavy as if 'twere a roller."

"Ah! that's how it ought to be," Fred retorted, chuckling. "Tickling don't do no good; 'tis the rubbing does it, and if it tingles it shows 'tis drawing the pain."

"Ah! it gives it to me, right enough," Bob answered, rather proud of being the object of such heroic measures. "However, you done it good, I 'low."

Fred was working that morning at a house in the new part of the village, half a mile down the Pricehurst road, and, when he started home for his dinner, it occurred to him that there would be no harm in getting a pint of porter for his grandfather to drink with his meal as a treat. "Mrs. Retson will loan me a jug, I've no doubt," he thought, and made for the "Gate," which, surrounded with new houses, looked out of place and shabby, although its custom had increased so greatly that its few remaining original customers were at times a little shy of entering it. At that time of

day, however, Fred knew that it was not likely to be crowded, and that he would have no difficulty in making a satisfactory arrangement about the jug with its good-natured, if rather superior, landlady, who was friendly enough with her old and humbler customers when there were no onlookers.

As Fred entered the door of the public-house, his footsteps deadened by a mat that lay on the threshold, he heard the loud, unsteadied voice of George Vines speaking in the little tap-room on the right of the passage.

"Twas Sally Dean, right enough," were the words he heard, and, as they reached his ears, he instinctively paused, hoping for more.

There was a pause, and then another voice, which Fred recognized as that of James Retson, spoke authoritatively.

"I know the place well; 'tis kep' by a man called Archer, in Taswell Street. 'Tain't often I am over there, but once or twice I've had a bite when as might be I was kep' longer in Pricehurst nor I looked for."

"Ah, that's it," Vines answered. "She only just popped in and out at t'other end of the room, as you might say. And I didn't let on as I saw her. I en't anxious to get mixed up with her sort."

"I lay you en't!" Retson agreed, laughing.

"Mind, what I am telling you ain't to go no further.
"Twouldn't do if 'twas to get all over the place. I
mentioned it to my missus, and she gave me the word

not to pass it about, for fear of young Fred getting hold of it. Sims there was something between them not long back."

"You can 'pend upon me," Retson answered. "Of course Fred be just the chap as would go and make a fool of himself, if he got half a chance. He's a reg'lar mismatch, he is, in some ways."

Fred, who had listened to the conversation with increasing excitement, was about to escape unnoticed, when Mrs. Retson, entering the passage from the kitchen, saw him at the door.

"Good-morning," she said in a friendly voice.
"How is your old dad?"

"Pretty bobbish. He is coming along nicely now," Fred answered. "I was just coming to ask if you would loan me a jug to take'n a pint of porter for hes dinner."

"Lend you a jug, is it?" Mrs. Retson asked. "Why, that I will, with pleasure. I dare say a drop of porter will do the old gentleman a deal of good. Just step into the bar, will you? Perhaps you would like a glass of something yourself?"

As Fred followed her into the room, he was acutely conscious of a sudden hiatus in the conversation that had been proceeding between its two occupants, and, with the tail of his eye, he caught the passage of a slow wink between them.

"As I say, nobody en't seen her for I don't know how long," Retson said loudly, as if continuing a con-

versation. "Nobody knows what has become of her though 'tis my belief she have cut away for good."

"We was talking about Sally Dean; you will remember her, of course?" Vines explained to Fred, who was casting undecided glances at the speakers.

"Ah! I mind her well enough," Fred answered, and turned to hide his embarrassment by taking the glass of "fourpenny" that Mrs. Retson had drawn for him.

From something in her face, he guessed that behind his back another wink, this time of ecstatic subtlety, had passed.

VI

One afternoon a few days later, Fred stood irresolutely at the corner of Taswell Street, conning its familiar features as if expecting them that day to be charged with new and subtle significance. It was an old-fashioned thoroughfare, with the curiously comfortable look of many provincial streets. On each side of the roadway, the width of which made them look almost squat, were continuous rows of houses, flatfronted, with ample Georgian windows, or gabled in an older mode, an occasional new or refronted house, vulgarly ostentatious among its sedate neighbors, providing the only jarring tones in the congruous incongruity of the street. Here and there hung out an inn sign, its once rich blazonings weathered and subdued

by sun and rain. Two or three carts were standing in front of shops, and along the pavements proceeded a handful of leisurely people, who seemed to have nothing better to do than to accentuate the sleepy tranquillity of the street by their own tranquil movements. It was, in fact, a homely, decent thoroughfare that had been little affected by the latter-day enterprise of the town. Its shops were chiefly inconspicuous, and almost insignificant in appearance; a mere handful of corn-chandlers, second-hand furniture dealers, and Italian stores. As if to emphasize the character of the street, a man in his shirt-sleeves, with a webbing belt and gaiters, was hushing and grooming a horse in the roadway outside a job-master's.

As he stood surveying this unemotional scene, Fred's heart beat so heavily that he could feel it shaking his jacket. Ever since overhearing the conversation at the "Gate," he had been trying to keep away from the spot on which he then stood. His first honest recognition of the undesirability of yielding to the temptation to see Sally had given place to an effort to reconcile surrender with expediency. He had yielded, and at the moment did not care whether or no his action was expedient; for, there, a little way down the street, was the eating-house where Sally had been seen only a short time before. She could hardly have left: at that very moment, probably, she was breathing and moving scarcely fifty yards from where he stood. He could see plainly the little bow-window of the eating-house,

decipher its faded legend-"Good Pull-up for Carmen "-in a moment he would see her. Yet he was afraid. His dread was intangible, inexplicable, but its existence could not be denied. It was as great, as disturbing, as his excitement; and each seemed to feed the other, making him almost powerless to take the decisive last step that would bring him face to face with the girl he had thus dreaded and desired almost all his life. As he stood hesitating, there suddenly came to him the memory of his brother, who practically had passed out of his life: for all that had been heard of him was a short, ill-scrawled letter, announcing that he had been drafted to India a few months before. He wished at that moment that he was Tom. If he had Tom's spirit. things would be so much more easy. He did not realize that Tom's unquestioning pertinacity, his unstudied phlegm, were evidences of a want of spirit, and not of its possession. He felt that, in his place. Tom by that time would have been chatting to Sally with easy familiarity, instead of shilly-shallying at a street corner, doomed, and aware that he was doomed. to timorous hesitancies when at last he managed to pass that enchanted threshold.

He passed it at last, but even as he entered the low-ceiled dining-room, with its sanded floor, there occurred to him with implacable insistence a doubt that until then had escaped him, in spite of all his self-questionings. Suppose Sally was married, after all? The fact that she was working where she had worked be-

fore had inevitably presented her to his mind unchanged. Directly the possibility of her marriage presented itself, however, it seemed extraordinary that he had overlooked it. There was, indeed, nothing to prevent her working where she did as a married woman. He would have retreated even then, to worry this new contingency, had he possessed the courage, but, faced by half a dozen customers, he could not bring himself to leave with unusual precipitation. Instead, he hastily entered one of the box-like recesses in which were the tables, giving the room the appearance of a little church furnished with old-fashioned high pews. haps, after all, Sally would not appear, he thought. Perhaps she worked in the kitchen, and her appearance in the dining-room was a matter of chance. of drawing consolation from that hypothesis, however, he was dismayed by it. He wanted both to have his cake and eat it, as it were; both dreaded and yearned for the meeting.

After a moment, all doubts and speculations were settled. A door closed in the distance, and, without other heralding sound, Sally appeared at the end of the room, like the fairy in a pantomime. Fred's temples throbbed, his emotion became so acute that a nausea crept over him, and his eyes grew misty. As through a dewed lens, he saw her walking easily down the room towards him, looking neat and comely in a cotton dress, bleached by much washing to the palest pink, a white apron hanging over her skirt. Her face, very pale,

seemed apathetic, but in her eyes there was a touch of detached wistfulness; as if, oblivious of her surroundings, she communed with some distant pathos.

Reaching the place where Fred was sitting, she stood with her finger-tips on the edge of the table, and for the first time looked at him. With the recognition in her eyes came a sudden vivifying of her whole expression, which as soon was schooled into immobility. She seemed waiting for Fred to speak. But he, with a sudden ridiculous loss of volition, tumbled out an order, as if he did not recognize her.

"Cup of tea; slice of bread-and-butter, please," he said, almost incoherently, and a moment later saw Sally pass from him down the room.

By the time she returned, carrying a mug and plate, with a faint flush upon her cheeks, Fred had recovered himself enough to greet her.

- "Why, Sally!" he said.
- "Yes, Fred?"
- "I heard you was here, and I come over."
- "I wonder why you came, after everything that has happened."
- "I wanted to see you, Sally," Fred explained, the tumult of his feelings crushed and tamed before it reached his mouth.
 - "Still?" Sally asked, rather wanly.
- "I don't care about what happened, nor anything," Fred answered. "You must have knowed I would come so soon as I heard you was here."

"I didn't think to see you here; 'tis few folk from Fidding that come. I hoped you wouldn't find out where I was. But you are right. I knowed you would come, if ever you did find out. You was always the same." Sally paused for a moment, and then, as if taking a sudden resolution, added, "I'm glad you have come, all the same. I hoped you would."

- "Do you mean that?" Fred asked.
- "I mustn't stop now," Sally answered, disregarding the question. "They will be wondering what I am doing. They are like cats with a mouse. Still, I ought to be used to that."
- "We couldn't talk here proper, in any case," Fred answered. "But you en't always here, are you?"
- "Eight to eight, and sleep in: that's near enough always for me."
- "But I want to see you, Sally. Can't you come out some time?"
 - "I might," she agreed.
 - "Will you come to-night, after you close here?"
 - "To-night!"
- "Yes; I want to see you special. And I told my old dad I might be home late."
- "You seem to have settled it all beforehand! What if I don't come?"
 - "You will," Fred surmised.
- "What has happened to Tom?" Sally inquired, suddenly becoming impersonal.
 - "He 'listed-last September 'twas."

SHEPHERD'S WARNING

"You never mean to say so!"

194

- "When he found you had gone."
- "Ah!" Sally breathed, looking at Fred vacantly; and then, smiling slowly, inscrutably, "Well, I will come," she added abruptly. "You meet me—where?"
 - "By the bridge at Town End," Fred suggested.
 - "But whatever will you do with yourself till then?"
- "Oh, I got plenty to do," Fred declared, with mystic detachment.

He felt, indeed, that during the interview he had accumulated so rich a store of matter for speculation that he would be oblivious of time.

When Sally left him, passed down the room, and vanished from sight, he sat for a time in a strange unrest. There floated into his mind a thought of Grace, who would be expecting to see him that evening. Bewitched by the pale girl who had just left him, he, who was usually so punctilious in avoiding any semblance of discourtesy, consigned Grace to limbo.

VII

The bridge at Town End was the place where Bob Garrett and the children had overtaken Mrs. Clarke that Saturday night so many years before, when Sally still lived with her parents. From it the last lamppost of Pricehurst could be seen shining, a solitary beacon, on one side, while, across the bridge towards

Fidding, stretched out the dark mass of the hills under a pallid waning moon. It was quiet there, at the threshold of the countryside, and Fred, waiting impatiently, could hear the tap of quick moving feet for some time before he saw Sally herself. Then a dark figure passed the lamp-post, and a moment later she was with him. It was a chilly evening, and the long dark coat, which she wore, made her face seem preternaturally pale in the dim light.

They instinctively turned from the road, and walked along a footpath beside the stream, where there was little chance of being seen, or of their conversation being overheard. Fred was intensely nervous. The six months during which he had not seen her seemed to have charged Sally with mysterious attributes, making her remote and intangible. She seemed very different from the girl who had been so easily swayed in the past, in spite of her incomprehensibility. glanced at her furtively, and was reassured. After all, she was the same Sally, strange and elusive, but warm, living and responsive. He wondered why she was so silent, saw that her dark eyes were fixed unwaveringly before her, as if she were listening and expectant; with eyes grown accustomed to the meagre light, he saw even her long uncurling eyelashes, her slightly parted lips, a white ear, shy among her hair. Was she expectant, or meditative?

"En't you got nothing to say to me, Sally?" he asked huskily.

SHEPHERD'S WARNING

"I thought 'twas you that wanted to speak to me," Sally answered with a slow smile.

"Do you try to madden people purposely?" Fred asked, with suddenly loosened tongue.

"I don't know," Sally answered, quite seriously.

"Sally, you know as well as I do why I come over this afternoon, and why I wanted to see you to-night you know you do!"

"Yes."

196

The word was uttered with reluctance, as if wrung from a restrained but torturing intensity.

"'Twas because there has never bin a day but I have wanted you. Sometimes I have burned for you; sometimes it's bin no more than an ache. But I have wanted you always. I have waited all the time for you to come back," Fred told her, his voice thick and drugged with emotion.

Sally made no response. Her pale face remained in repose, but beneath this assumption of tranquillity she was being torn by a fierce conflict of complex emotions.

"Sally, are you married?" Fred asked, after a strained pause.

Sally shook her head.

"You're not!" Fred's voice ran through radiant chromatics of ecstasy. "I won't let you go again, then. Say you will be my gal, always."

Fred had stopped walking, and caught Sally by her two arms, holding her face to face with him, so close that her coat stirred against his jacket. She stood there, suddenly breathless, looking at him with her dark, wide-set eyes.

- "What is it you do to me?" he asked.
- "I don't know; I don't care," she said.
- "Will you be my missus, Sally?" Fred's voice had a soft, endearing cadence.
- "Let me go, and I will answer you," Sally told him, as if waking from seductive dreams.
 - "But you haven't given me so much as a kiss!"
- "A kiss! You can have your fill. Kisses are cheap. Oh, Fred, you don't know. What is the use of it all? Let me go, I tell you. "Tis madness, all of it. I don't know why I came, even; except that I always do what I shouldn't."

She backed from Fred's arms, and walked to the edge of the stream.

- "I wonder what is the use of me?" she speculated.
- "What is wrong, Sally? Why don't you answer me, as you said you would?"
- "What is wrong?" Sally repeated, paused almost imperceptibly, and added defiantly, "Why, there is plenty wrong. I am going to have a baby."

Precedent would have provided Fred with many correct attitudes to assume on hearing this announcement, but he remained natural.

- "Do you mean that?" he asked. "You en't getting at me?"
- "Getting at you!" Sally exclaimed in a broken voice.

"You mean it, then, really?"

She nodded, bereft of fortitude.

"Poor old gal!" Fred murmured.

A moment later, Sally was in his arms.

"Fred, I've bin frightened," she told him unaffectedly. "You don't know what I bin through. And I don't know what to do. I can't keep it to myself much longer. That Archer and hes missus will find out soon, if they don't know it already. I have caught them talking. There's nowhere for me to go 'cept the House, as I know of. I won't go there. I would die sooner. You don't know. 'Tis terrible. And there wasn't no one to tell, till you come."

"Poor old gal," Fred said again, patting her shoulder, with makeshift comfort. "Twas last September, I suppose, and he wouldn't marry you?"

His words had a recuperative effect. Sally became tense in his arms, as a twig starts in a dowser's hand when water is crossed.

"He never said he would. I never wanted him to."

"Wasn't you meaning to get married?"

"No, I wasn't. Why should I have got married, unless I wanted to? I have been made to do as other people wanted all my life—en't I ever to do as I like myself?"

"But 'ten't right, Sally."

Sally, who by gradual stages of mutual remission had become entirely freed, moved impatiently.

"We won't go into that, Fred," she said, and turning disdainfully, added, "You are just like the rest."

"I dare say I am. I don't set up to be no different. But don't you see——"

"Ah, you are thinking 'tis my own fault the way I am. Maybe 'tis. But how was I to know I would not be able to bear being with him?"

"'Twasn't he as left you, then?"

Sally shook her head vehemently.

"Weren't he good to you?"

"Oh, he was good enough, but all this don't alter it, do it?"

Fred went up to where she stood, and caught her apathetic arm with his hand.

"I don't care how 'tis," he said desperately. "It don't make no difference to me, Sally."

"It do," she answered fiercely, "and you know it."

"Well, be how it will, I am asking you to have me."

Sally looked up quickly, her eyes soft with tenderness.

"Oh, Fred, you're a poor fool," she said softly.

"I don't care."

"But why should I marry you?"

"Well, you got to do something, en't you?"

A humorous perception took Sally like a cool air on a sultry day. She laughed with unforced merriment.

"I wonder if there was ever such another as you!"

she said. "You don't ask if I like you, then, nor anything else."

"I dessay there's like. I don't hardly expect more, you see," Fred explained.

"You dear old Fred!" Sally retorted, serious again.
"You don't know what you are saying. How could you marry me? Why, your folk were bitter agen me before. What do you think they would say now? Do you think I would come to you as I am now!"

"Maybe 'twould be a hit awkward for you at Fidding."

"Fidding! Do you think I care what they say, or think?—for myself, I would come if 'twas only to show them how little I care. But I can't, Fred."

"En't I told you I don't care? Do you think I have waited only to be put off by this?" Even as he spoke, Fred wilted a little, but he did not falter. He felt that he could bear anything if only Sally became his.

"If I did, they would always be telling you I took you only to get out of my trouble."

"Do you think I would care?"

"Oh, Fred, if I could!"

"But what is to stop you, Sally?"

"Tis myself. I have used you so ill, Fred; and then to run to you simply because there is nowhere else for me to go ——"

"Did you care for him so terrible much more than me?"

- "I don't care for him now."
- "Do you care for me, then?"
- "I 'spect I always have done, Fred."
- "'Tis good enough for me."

Poor Sally! She had fought her poor fight against insuperable hosts. Fidding might be hostile, but what would equal the hostility and terror she must face elsewhere? And perversely, wickedly perhaps, she wanted Fred, always had wanted him, in spite of the impulsive actions that had estranged them. Her seeming intolerance of the world's disfavor had no foundation on essential courage; her little stock of fortitude had been sapped, and almost exhausted during the last few months, when, in her little bedroom in Taswell Street, with increasing insistency there had been brought home to her the fact that disdain did not create immunity.

"If you still think the same next time you see me, you can have me," she said faintly.

Fred started forward.

"Please don't touch me, Fred," she implored.

Soon afterwards, they turned back towards the bridge, and, having reached it, paused to say good-bye.

- "You never asked who he was, Fred," Sally said.
- "I don't want to know; don't tell me," he answered quickly, feeling in some way protected from too bitter thoughts by the impersonal quality that attached to the man to whom Sally had given herself.
 - "But I will tell you-really I will," Sally declared,

with self-reproachful abasement. At that moment, inspired by the quality of Fred's seeming generosity, as by a haunting melody, she was ready, eager even, to reveal to him the most intimate secrets, to lay bare the ultimate shame of her soul.

VIII

Fred did not ask himself the cause of his infatuation for Sally, did not even attempt to define her attributes in his mind, but pursued her fumblingly, insistently, as if she were the quarry in a desperate game of blindman's buff. Perhaps his interest had been stimulated not only by the ill-starred circumstances of her life, but also by the elusive quality that had marked his relationship with her. There were a dozen superficial reasons, each sufficient to attract an imaginative, if inarticulate, nature like his own. But behind everything else there lurked the indubitable, if unperceived, fact that Sally and himself, both exotic in temperament, were attracted by an innate chord of mutual sympathy.

As was inevitable, Fred had suffered a reaction from the exaltation that had sustained him during that nocturne by the river. He realized fairly completely to what he would be committed if he redeemed his undertaking to marry Sally, but, beset as he was by forebodings, he did not withdraw. Not in a spirit of generosity, but of irrational cupidity, he determined to possess her, and, lest reason should become too insistent, purposely refrained from dwelling on the displeasing features of his undertaking. Unlike Tom, who under similar circumstances would stolidly have tortured himself by keeping constantly before him Sally's condition, Fred avoided facing it, slipped past it by soft elusions and evasions, or fled it as one who steals round corners on slippered feet.

Dissemble the implications as he would, Fred was forced to modify his first airy plans. When finally he repeated his offer to Sally, and she accepted it, he proposed that directly they were married she should live in his grandfather's cottage at Fidding. But Sally pointed out, and he had to agree, that such a course would be a mere provocation of unnecessary difficulties. It would be far better for him to remain silent about his marriage until Sally's child was born, only afterwards announcing what he had done. It would be bad enough then, but not so bad as if the child was actually born at Fidding. Sally must live in rooms.

"The only question is, can you afford to keep me, Fred?" Sally asked. "It stands to reason I can't work; indeed, I can scarce avoid showing how things are, now."

"I have got ten quid put by," Fred announced proudly. "'Twill just see us to the end of it, I reckon."

SHEPHERD'S WARNING

204

"I have got two pound, Fred, and we shall want it all, you will find. There will be expenses of sorts, I am afraid."

"I don't hardly see how we are to keep it dark, now I come to think," Fred observed gloomily. "Somebody is bound to hear when we are asked."

"We need not be asked," Sally assured him. "We shall have to get married at a Registry Office. You only have to give notice then, to show you have lived in the place. Fidding will come under Pricehurst, I reckon, so 'twill all be done there."

"I don't much hold with any but Church marriages," Fred objected doubtfully. "Still, I s'pose 'tis all ship-shape with these Registry ones."

Sally convinced him, and, as it was becoming daily more urgent for her to be able to leave her work without delay, they lodged notice at the Registrar's office, and decided that she should move into lodgings at once, without waiting till the marriage could take place.

The resolution was easily formed, but hard to fulfil. They made inquiries, and visited house after house in the poorer parts of the town. But in every case, the women they interviewed, on hearing that they were not yet married, glanced with diabolical penetration and shrewdness at Sally, and refused to have her. At first Sally, characteristically, became fired with independence and disdain; but when the same thing happened time after time, her spirit waned and she

became depressed. At length, it seemed as if she had no chance of finding a haven in that practical town.

"Whatever shall we do, Fred?" she asked. "I feel as if I could hardly walk much farther. We shall have to try again another day, not that 'twill be any good."

"There is a little shop up the street. Shall I ask there?" Fred suggested, with transparent pessimism. "Tis possible they will know of someone."

At first the woman interviewed thought she knew of nobody, but after consideration remembered a Mrs. Walters who might perhaps take Sally. "She will be comfortable enough, if she do," she added decidedly.

So the weary pair called on Mrs. Walters, an old woman who lived in one of a row of tiny houses.

- "Your wife, you say?" she asked harshly when Fred said that he wanted rooms for Sally.
- "Well, we are going to get married so soon as the notice expires at the Registry," Fred explained for the thirtieth time.
- "Ah, I thought as much. She wouldn't be needing for you to ask for her else," the old woman retorted. "Going to be married at the Registry, are you?"

She paused for consideration and eyed her visitors speculatively.

- "Have you been anywhere else, asking?"
- "Yes, that we have!"
- "Well, you are honest enough to own it," Mrs. Walters conceded, and turning to Sally, added, "I don't

mind your seeing the room, and you can leave your young man down here."

While Fred with reviving spirits waited at the door, the two women went up-stairs.

"Here is the room. 'Tis not big, but you could swing a cat in it, as the saying is," Mrs. Walters said; "or dangle a babby, I dessay."

At Sally's flame of mortification she laughed.

- "So that is how 'tis? I thought as much, my dear," she said in a softer voice. "Would nobody take you?"
 - "They just stared," Sally answered indignantly.
 - "Well, 'tis partly your own fault, you know."
 - "'Tis all my own fault; 'twas none of his."
- "Well, my dear, I won't forswear ye, but there en't many as would own to it."

Further explanation was impossible, and Sally remained silent.

"You would be a rare bother, you know," continued Mrs. Walters, "and I never looked at one like you before. But you seem an honest pair of fools, and perhaps I will take you. How long would you be wanting to stay?"

The air cleared. Sally explained what she and Fred had decided, and, after a little discussion, Mrs. Walters agreed to board her for fourteen shillings a week.

Soon they returned to the impatient Fred.

"Well, mister, 'tis all arranged," Mrs. Walters greeted him.

"I am sure I am thankful to you, mother. I was beginning to wonder where she would get took."

"You keep your 'mothers' for a while," the old woman retorted. "Maybe you will be wanting them."

Having arranged that Sally would take the room in a week, when she left Taswell Street, they walked away.

"She sims a toughish old customer. Still, 'tis better nor nobody," Fred said, as they walked away.

"She is all right, Fred," Sally told him. "You wait till you know her."

"Anyone would think you was friends, to hear you!"

"She's a nice old gal, anyway," Sally answered, "and 'tis a sweet clean little room, as you will see for yourself one day."

Fred walked on, turning that strange possibility over in his mind.

IX

During the following days Fred's thoughts, protected by a palisade of excitement, were untroubled except by practical activities. The unexpected reappearance of Sally, and its decisive effect upon his life, were events of such moment that he could not quickly digest them, or see them in perspective. For a time

they threw his entire outlook out of focus. back of his mind, like the bare back wall of a proscenium which outlasts the brilliant ephemerality of the transformation scene which hides it, lurked the consciousness of difficulties some day to be faced and overcome. But the transient iridescence of the moment dominated him. Sometimes as he worked during those days, the thought of Grace Pertwood insinuated its way into his mind, disturbing and persistent; sometimes the insubstantial serenity of his grandfather and sister made him feel guilty. In repelling these distressing reminders of future obstacles. he was aided not only by the exhilaration of the moment but also by the consciousness that the action he was taking, if unwise, was permissible. At times, he asked himself why he should allow the prejudices of other people to influence and disturb him, but this show of spirit was simulated; he knew well enough that, brace himself, fortify himself as he would, by flambovant protestations, always and decisively he would be ruled by his fatally submissive nature. such moments of enlightenment, he felt thankful that no one would know of his marriage until it had actually taken place.

Thanks to the independent nature of his work, Fred was able to get over to Pricehurst fairly often, and he never set out without feeling that he was encumbered by a formidable press of affairs. In reality, there was not very much for him to do. When the time came,

he went to help Sally move from the eating-house, and was confronted by Mrs. Archer, the proprietress, who, suspicious, inquisitive and vindictive, murmured insincere thanks to heaven with obscure but provoking implication. All Sally's belongings were contained in a little, corded, brown tin trunk, which Fred easily carried in one hand to Mrs. Walters' cottage, experiencing a thrill of intimate possession that made him look with new eyes at Sally, as she walked beside him with the introspective look of a somnambulist.

His feeling became accentuated when the cottage was reached, and, shouldering the little box, he took it up to the tiny bedroom. He knelt down, trembling, to untie the cord, and was anxious to exploit his new relationship by helping Sally to unpack. But when he suggested doing so, she shook her head silently, with an expression of speculative amusement, which was, nevertheless, the herald of a more responsive mood. Sinking down on the bed, and sitting in luxurious abandonment, her arms lying listlessly beside her, she sighed gratefully.

"'Tis good to be out of it all," she told Fred. "I feel like I was in bed after a bad headache, with the pain gone, and birds singing outside the window."

Fred looked at her without answering, savoring her words, relishing and embellishing the picture she created in his mind. He felt then very tranquil, and humbly thankful.

"Do you think you can love me still?" Sally asked,

with a smiling confidence that seemed to take fright at the very words it had provoked. "It will all be over soon, you know," she assured him hastily, "and I shall be just the same."

"Do you need to be told?" Fred asked.

"I like to be told. You don't know . . ." Sally's voice trailed away. "I don't think I want you to see me much till afterwards," she added thoughtfully, and became convinced by his protestations.

They were married ten days later, and both were thankful when they left the Registrar, the kindness of whose crisp formality was tempered by the sharp, probing glances he occasionally shot forth from his normally apathetic eyes. After the ceremony, they had a splendid dinner of pickled pork and beans, with bread-and-butter pudding to follow, which Mrs. Walters, the cook, shared, as she shared the two bottles of stout that had been bought at a little shop at the corner of the street. As the meal progressed, Mrs. Walters relaxed the almost inhuman restraint which, with a few exceptions, had marked her attitude towards the young couple.

"It is far from my mind to pry into what don't concern me," she explained to Sally, "but sims to me as you are faint-hearted like, to be that afraid of your young man's dad. He got to know some time, en't he? That is unless things is very fortunit. Even so, be how 'twill, en't he going to ask what made you marry each other without letting on?"

"He don't like me, you see," Sally explained weakly.

"Well, 'twon't make him like you no more, the way you are doing things. He have got to stomach you sooner or later, and if you ask me, ill physic's best soon taken."

It was not surprising that, their tongues being tied on the most important facts of the position, neither Fred nor Sally was able to make a very presentable case to explain why they were acting in so unusual a way. Mrs. Walters, indeed, admitted frankly, and petulantly, that she could make neither head nor tail of their explanations, and that, while it was no concern of hers, there were some people who would have no hesitation in calling them a couple of poor creatures that would never come to any good if they went on as they had begun. Stout having acted as an emollient upon her heart, she was reduced, if not to actual tears, to a running nose and thickened articulation, when Fred said good-bye and set out for Fidding, leaving Sally at the cottage.

"'Tis neither natural nor right to leave you so, dearie," she told Sally, with a critical sniff. "I never heard of sich a thing, and you with the ring scarcely warm on your finger as yet. 'Tis as poor a beginning for a married pair as ever I see, nor anyone else, I reckon."

But sniff as she might, Mrs. Walters could effectually check neither the running of her nose nor the rapidly retreating figure of Fred, who was at that mo-

212 SHEPHERD'S WARNING

ment beginning to realize, as he had not realized before, what was in store for him.

X

All the preliminary excitement being over, those previously balked forebodings became insistent and made Fred realize very clearly that his marriage was the beginning and not the end of the fight. But he had regarded the plans he had made with a certain ingenuous satisfaction; they were working smoothly; Sally was actually his wife (disturbing and ecstatic thought!), had even named him husband, with an air of speculative humor, before parting from him on the day of the marriage, and had made amends for her mental critical detachment by bestowing a warmly responsive kiss upon his eager lips. What was there to make the remainder of his plans go wrong? Nothing, surely? Did not the fact that all had been well so far augur, if not in some mysterious way guarantee, the successful maturing of the remainder? Fred's own submissive nature, while it enabled him to understand and foresee aversions having so concrete a foundation as his grandfather's aversion for Sally, could neither gauge nor comprehend illogical rebellions of mood and reactions of temperament against purely passive circumstances. It seemed to him, in fact, that Sally would welcome the quiet security of Mrs. Walters' cottage, would draw comfort there from past tumult, as one who having safely made a haven regards appreciatively the wild and broken waters from which he has so lately escaped. Had not Sally herself practically adopted that attitude when, sitting on the bed, she had likened herself to one just freed from the burden of an aching head? It seemed to him, therefore, that for two or three months there would be nothing for him to do but await the time when the next step in his plans became due.

But what to Fred was so axiomatic, an adherence to a prearranged time-table, to Sally was a matter of no importance, and even had it been of importance there were in her composition, especially at that time, tangled skeins of impulse and whim that would answer to no guiding hand. Sally rarely allowed Fred to see her, and when she did, seemed aloof and almost impersonal, sitting with reserved immobility in the cottage kitchen. Fred did not guess the ferment of baffled sensations that seethed behind Sally's quiet face; she gave him no hint of them until they became entirely uncontrollable, so that what was really the final decision in a long sequence of uncertainties seemed merely an unjustifiable impulse.

"I can't stay here, Fred," she told him suddenly, one afternoon, when they were sitting together in an artificial restraint, during the absence of Mrs. Walters.

"What do you mean?" Fred asked, puzzled.

SHEPHERD'S WARNING

"I mean I can't stay here any longer. "Tis more than I can bear. Wait, wait! It gets on my nerves."

Fred, who imagined Sally's words to be caused by a natural depression, endeavored to soothe her, but his efforts were useless.

"'Tis no good talking, Fred," Sally told him. "You must take me home."

"Take you home! But I thought you and Mrs. Walters was reg'lar friends!"

"'Tis nothing to do with that. There is nothing for me to do but sit still," Sally declared, and, impulsively rising from her chair, passed across the little room to stand gazing petulantly from the window. "I don't know 'xactly what 'tis I want, Fred," she confessed. "But if I stay here much longer I shall begin to hate you."

"But I don't see as I done aught to distress you," Fred protested.

"Done! You haven't done nothing. 'Tis what you haven't done. Oh! Fred, 'tis too good you are. You couldn't be kinder, and I know it, and all the same it don't satisfy me. 'Tis your kindness makes me so mad. Why don't you do or say something!"

"Now, Sally, old gal, don't you take on. You will feel different before long, very like."

"You couldn't say more, not if you was Mrs. Walters!" Sally exclaimed, turning with a flash of amusement. "You are a funny chap. . . . I s'pose 'tis as I en't used to kindness."

And then this incomprehensible Sally reduced Fred to dumb sympathy, by passing from dark intensity and quick humor to a state of tremulous tearfulness. As the smile faded from her lips they trembled, and her great eyes filled with tears.

"Don't you take on, Sally, my darlint," he implored. "Don't you take on. You shall come to Fidding, be how't will."

With this assurance. Sally gained vitality, mocked his fears, and declared her spirit stout enough to brave a hundred grandfathers, the public opinion of a continent.

- "When can I come?" she asked impetuously.
- "Well, I shall have to say something first," Fred explained. "But it won't take long. You shall come before the week is out, my gal."

With Sally herself again, Fred did not much worry about the difficulties that would arise from the concession he had made to cause this sparkling transformation.

When he left, Sally went to the door with him, with a provoking mixture of shyness and bravado ignoring the fact that usually she concealed with careful artifice.

- "There is something else," she said.
- "Ah?" Fred cautiously encouraged her.
- "You see, I want to be with you."

Curiously enough, this demonstrativeness of Sally's, so sadly missed during its long absence, awoke within

him a slight aversion, an irresistible perception of the shadow that lay between them.

XI

Having once put off breaking the news to his grand-father and Liddy, Fred found it extraordinarily tempting to play with the quite useless idea of putting it off again. But his programme had been altered—altered in accordance with Sally's wishes—and the amended programme had to be carried out. Since that was so, the sooner he got it over, rather, the sooner he plunged into the maelstrom, the better. When he reached home that evening, primed with desperate resolve, it was with a shock of relief that he heard his grandfather's voice hailing him from the up-stairs bedroom to which the old man had returned after Liddy was married.

"That you, Fred?" the old man called. "You are late enough. Where ha' you bin?"

"Over to Pricehurst. There was someone I had to see. But 'twill keep till the morning," Fred answered. "What are you doing in your bed so early?" he continued, taking greedy advantage of the fortuitous circumstance. So deftly slinks the debtor down a handy turning when his creditor approaches.

"Well, you see there weren't much else I could do, you being out. And my old back have bin giving it

me again proper. 'Tweren't a bit of use going out in the garden. 'Twas as much as I could do to walk, let alone bend."

"All right, old gentleman," Fred answered, hilarious at the reprieve. "I will hot up the flat iron, and give him a doing."

"You git your supper first, Fred. There en't no hurry about my back; he can wait," the old man called in answer.

It seemed to Fred almost a malicious freak of chance that his grandfather at that moment should show himself so much at his best. How could he deal so shrewd a blow to one who, to the dullest wit, was obviously admirable, full of fortitude and resignation, who turned, on the whole, a brave face to all the small discomforts and setbacks that must seem so formidable to one of his years? Eating his supper, Fred felt as he must feel who postpones breaking some dreadful news in order that his own comfort may not be discomposed.

During the following morning, Fred walked resolutely up the village to see Liddy. A night spent chiefly in agitated self-communing had made him realize that the wisest thing to do would be to fling his troubles at Liddy's feet, leaving her to collect and dispose of them. This unadmitted intention of shifting his burden to another's shoulders made Fred feel comparatively light-hearted as he walked up the village. He tried for a moment to frighten himself by the possibility

that Liddy, instead of succoring him, might gather her skirts about her own clean ankles and repudiate him. But he knew well enough that she would not fail him. This instinctive conviction, indeed, gave a pleasant aroma to his insincere forebodings, making him feel somewhat as the child at a pantomime feels when its back delightfully creeps at the sight of bogies, which are not really bogies after all.

Fred came to the ground with a jar. There before him, pouting provocatively over the gate of her mother's cottage, was Grace Pertwood, the bugbear of his conscience.

"Morning, Grace," he said with an ingratiating smile.

"When are you coming to give me a hand in my garden again, I would like to know?" Grace answered with sweet raillery. "I am sure I don't know what will happen to you, so busy you are getting. Why, 'tis the most part of a month since you have given so much as a look to my little patch. You must be making a fortin, I am sure."

"'Tis true my time never sims me own, as I have told you before," Fred answered. Had everyone, he wondered, conspired to make him ashamed by their good-humor?

"Is it true as you have got work over to Pricehurst, besides all you do here?" Grace asked, with apparent innocence.

"Who has bin telling you that?"

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"I don't know as anyone actually said as much, but I hear you are over there a wonderful lot, and thought as how 'twould very likely be as you was working there."

Was this a heaven-sent opportunity?

Fred opened his mouth to break his devastating news, but from it floated his resolution like a bubble breaking silently in the air.

"'Ten't hardly working I go," he explained lamely.
"'Tis along of some business I have there."

Ignoring the budding petulance on Grace's face, certain premonition that the dogs of jealousy were about to be slipped, Fred passed on.

"Durn her!" he thought, the wholly uncharacteristic and shameful censure being wrung from him by his own cowardice.

Fred found Liddy knitting a baby's sock in her kitchen, and this evidence of an already self-evident fact, towards which her attitude was an attractive mixture of embarrassment and boldness, made painful the contrast between her own state of happy expectancy and the miserable position of his ill-starred Sally.

"Fred! Well, I declare! Whatever brings you here?" Liddy exclaimed, faltering for a moment in her work, and then, as if ashamed of her shame, ostentatiously resuming it.

"I have got something to tell you, Liddy," Fred answered, his throat suddenly parched.

"There en't nothing wrong with dad?" Liddy asked

anxiously, and then, reassured by a shake of his head, said: "Well, get on with it, do!"

- "Fact is, I am married, Lid."
- "Married!"
- "Ah, and bin so this fortnight since," Fred answered, parrying, if only for a moment, the necessity of naming his wife.
- "What in the world do you mean, Fred? Who is it?" Liddy's words were a torrent.
 - "'Tis Sally Dean."

There was a strained silence.

"Oh, Fred, you never mean to say that!" Liddy implored.

She was heroic, gave Fred as much of her opinion of his action as she thought good for him, and then her mind turned to her grandfather. It would be a terrible blow to him, of course, but since the worst was done, there remained only palliative measures to be taken.

"You are going to bring her to the cottage!" she exclaimed, when Fred explained his plans. "Oh, dear! I s'pose there en't nothing else for it, but 'twill hurt him, Fred, and he bin always so proud and good."

This outburst at the mere fact of his marriage made Fred incapable of attempting to explain the position more fully. With short-sighted cowardice, he left the future to speak for itself.

"I thought, Liddy, as p'r'aps you'd help me to tell him. I don't hardly know how to begin," he said.

That pitiful appeal made Liddy warm for him.

"Of course I will," she assured him. "Dear! 'Ten't no use crying over spilt milk. 'Tis done, and that is the end on't. I have told you what I think, but if you have bin foolish, it en't going to make me bitter. I will pop over this afternoon, and you make a point of coming home for a cup of tea. We will see how we can manage then."

When Fred was leaving, Liddy with warm generosity of heart tried to reassure him.

"'Twill all come right in the end, Fred," she said.
"'Tis always so. As for myself, it won't be me as will cast stones at Sally because of what's past and ought to be done with."

She returned to her knitting with a troubled heart, and, in spite of all her affectionate loyalty to Fred, had so much to say to her husband when he came home that she hardly knew where to begin. But, throughout her words, there ran a reiterated refrain:—"'Tis just like Fred—he would throw himself away every day in the week if he had the chance." The tragic history of Grace Pertwood did not occur to her.

XII

That evening, regardless of twinges and aches, old Bob Garrett worked doggedly in his garden. There was nothing to show that he was wrestling with very bitter tidings. But, when from time to time he paused to wipe the sweat from his forehead with a lean forearm, it could be seen that his brows were fiercely contracted, and that the corners of his long mobile mouth were sternly drawn down.

He had been in good spirits during the afternoon, and when first Liddy and afterwards Fred dropped in to tea, he was childishly gratified.

"Sims quite like old times," he said. "'Tis pretty near the first time I have bin glad of these here new games of leaving work before the day is half done."

Since the new owner moved into Bentwood Farm. Bob had generally found himself at home by five o'clock in the afternoon. But what was intended as a generous concession was to him merely aggravating. It gave him more time to work in his garden, but there was seldom much for him to do there. The result was that he was apt to moon disconsolately about the village most of the evening, or drift up to Luke Medlar's cottage for a talk with his old friend, who was rapidly becoming too feeble to do much more than sit in a chair and bemoan a largely imaginary penury. had been delightful, therefore, to find himself the host at a little impromptu tea-party, and he had bustled about to make the tea, refusing Liddy's help, with deft solicitude settling her in his own armchair, and patting her young shoulder with his shaky hand.

Tea began pleasantly enough, for Bob was not suffitently observant to notice the nervous expectancy of his grandson, who sat pale and tense, with his blue eyes flitting from one to the other of his companions.

- "Well, dad, I have got a surprise for you—something to tell you," Liddy announced during a pause. "Can you guess what 'tis?"
- "That I can't," her grandfather declared, after staring with placid vacuity at the kettle.
- "What would you say to our Fred getting married?"
- "Ah! It wouldn't be so wonderful surprising," Bob answered, looking pleased.
- "You would be surprised if you was to be told who 'twas, though," Liddy assured him.
- "En't I got eyes in my head? Well, there is worse gals nor Grace, and I en't going to complain on her."
- "But it en't Grace, dad. 'Tis someone as you don't like, though 'tis no fault of hers, her being what she is."
- "I don't know what you're getting at. Out with it, Liddy. Don't kip me hanging about. Why can't you speak out?"

Bob was growing querulous as the result of uneasy suspicions, and, while Liddy still tried to find words that would soften the news, Fred, with impulsive recklessness, blurted it out, in all its stark harshness.

- "'Tis Sally Dean, and we bin married this two weeks."
- "You mean to say that!" his grandfather shouted. "You marry that gal!"

224 SHEPHERD'S WARNING

His anger was expected and, therefore, comparatively easy to face; but the sudden transition to broken submission that followed was disconcerting and distressing.

"There! I might have known it," Bob added in a childish drool. "Sims I'm a beggar pretty near, and can't choose."

After that, he remained in a state of passive resentment. Fred, feeling horribly brutal, was forced to explain that he intended to bring Sally home, unfolding his plans in a depressing silence.

"Have it how you will—have it how you will," the old man kept repeating, and sat mumbling and puckering his lips.

Bob retained his attitude of resignation, with only one short break when Liddy was leaving. Then he walked with her to the gate.

"'Tis a dreadful worrit, dad," Liddy said, "but I do hope, if 'tis only for Fred's sake, you won't be too hard on Sally. 'Tis too late to mend."

"Fred's sake!" her grandfather repeated. "'Tis a lot he thinks of me! What have I done, I ask you, that I should have that dirty baggage in my house? En't Fred got no more sense nor a monkey! I tell you, Liddy, I have had just about enough of Fred and his ways. He sims to think me and my feelings go for naught. I will ha' none of her. She may come into my house, but I'll have naught to do with her."

XIII

Although eleven years had passed since the murder, it was not long before there were plenty of people sufficiently cognizant of Sally's history to study her with interest when, with tight-lipped defiance, she passed about Fidding, and to speculate, baffled but interestedly, why Fred had married her. To Sally this notoriety was stimulating, even welcome, in comparison with the strained silence that surrounded her in the cottage. When Fred first brought her from Pricehurst. Bob had conceded a surly, "You have come, then!" but after that not only had he avoided speech with her, but also had attempted not to see her, so that he seemed to move about in the cottage guiltily, with shifty eyes. In the face of this quiet hostility it was difficult for Fred and Sally even to talk when the old man was present. Every meal was passed in silence which seemed emphasized by the forced and insincere remarks that Fred uttered from time to time, remarks that seemed to hang for a moment motionless in the air, and then slowly subside, like pale rockets in a lonely sky.

Before long, Sally's condition became obvious, although Liddy studiously ignored it, and Bob, whose averted eyes did not keep him ignorant, made no comment, but turned the fact over and over in his mind.

breeding from it added resentment and disgust. the village the primary feeling was still merely one of curiosity. Even Bob's contemporaries, the good opinion of whom alone he valued, were not severe moral critics. Affairs such as this seemed to be had occurred too frequently to provoke censure: most Fidding mothers, indeed, had Sally been their daughter, would have thought very little about a mishap that ended so satisfactorily in timely marriage. not so many years since the cart was put before the horse, and many, if not most, village girls in certain parts of the country conducted their pre-nuptial affairs in a manner rich with mythological implications. Bob's sensitiveness, indeed, was considered rather pe-His aversion for his daughter-in-law was intelligible, but his extraordinary concern at a fact that, when all was said and done, merely proved that the continuity of his family was assured, seemed beyond the limits of rational conduct. Bob, in fact, lived under a cloud that existed almost entirely in his own mind.

The most profoundly interested critic of the drama that was being played with such quiet intensity in the village was Luke Medlar. His increasing years were attended by disabilities, but the keenness of his interest in the affairs of other people was unblunted. On such days as he felt well enough to stump to and fro with his tools in a wheelbarrow, he probed every cottage and house he passed with his inquisitive old eyes, which

looked bland and artless behind a pair of spectacles. His method was inductive: from the state of a garden or from a glimpse through an open door he would elaborate a tolerably accurate idea of the affairs not of his acquaintances alone, but of everybody for whom he worked. That readily assumed and plausible benevolence of his was irresistible to cooks, who, affecting to despise him, would really show a weak obsequiousness, give him the freedom of their kitchens, and weave for him rich skeins of gossip, repaying with authentic modern instances his skilful revelations of past and apocryphal scandals.

When Luke heard of Sally's arrival, he winked astutely at his onion setts, but for a time said nothing. Beneath his superficial, magpie curiosity there lurked a certain amount of warped good-nature. His inference that Fred was going through a very difficult period, added to a certain grudging respect he felt for his young partner, was sufficient to check his garrulity. and enable him to meet Fred as if nothing particular had happened. This concession, however, did not prevent his keeping a sharp eye and ear available to pick up any hints of the position that passed his way. He derived in particular a rather malicious pleasure from watching the attitude of Grace Pertwood. noted her quick avoidance of Fred, the agility with which she slipped out of sight into the cottage when he appeared in sight; noted, too, the fact that her girl friends, like crows proceeding to a carrion feast, hastened to visit the cottage—no doubt on excellent pretexts—and the excited hum of her wayside conferences. It seemed evident that she was busy backbiting, without having the courage to confront Fred. All the same, Luke was curious about her, and determined to confirm his deductions, with a stimulating premonition that she would be ready enough to wring out her soiled linen even with himself as a spectator, did she get the chance.

,It was, therefore, with an exultant expectoration that he prepared to beard Grace one morning, when she came up the lane past his cottage.

"Nice morning, Grace," he hailed pleasantly, and Grace, who ordinarily would have passed with the merest echo of his greeting, detecting the sympathy with which his tone was baited, stopped in the expectation of having her sores gratuitously licked, while dissimulating her gratification with lofty disdain.

"So 'tis," she said. "You be busy, Mr. Medlar."

"Ah, my old garden, he never gives me much rest. You will be having less help in your own now, sims." Grace flushed rather uneasily.

"I don't know that I want no help," she retorted.

"You was wonderful wrapped up in your garden so long as you could get a certain pair of trousers along with you," Luke retorted and, seeing that she was about to escape, added hurriedly, "'Tis a queer start, young Fred Garrett going and getting married with that gal. en't it?"

"I can't say as it interests me partic'ler," Grace answered distantly.

"I must say I thought as you would get him yourself at the end on't."

Why did that tongue of his play him such tricks, scaring the quarry so unnecessarily?

"I am sure I don't know what 'tis you mean, Mr. Medlar," Grace declared with a very red face.

"Why, my dear, en't everyone saying how shameful he have treated you? There's many wonders he had the face to bring that Sally of his back with him."

That was the proper treatment: another dose perhaps would be sufficient.

"I am sure I never asked no one to be so taken up with what don't concern them," Grace faltered.

"Don't concern them? Don't it concern nobody to see a chap like Fred go and behave that bad? I would never have thought it of'n; that I wouldn't."

"'Ten't nothing to me what he do," Grace declared.

"But I always thought he was a bit sly. I am sure I hope he will be more fortunate nor what folks expect. When I think of that Sally Dean, and he doing as he has, I can't think how I ever put myself out to take notice of him. But, there! To hear how he carried on, you would have thought he'd have bin ill if I hadn't! 'Tis what comes of being good-natured. I could tell you things as would make you open your eyes."

"Is that so?" Luke exclaimed with deep interest. "Well, it merely shows you!"

"If it wasn't that I have no notion of demeaning myself, I would tell that Sally a few of the things he said."

"I lay you would, Grace! 'Twould serve him right."

"I would give them both something to think about, I assure you!"

"'Tis no wonder you feel that way," Luke assured her in a silky voice. "It must be terrible sore work for one as worked so hard as yourself, to be jilted."

"What do you mean?" Grace asked sharply.

"What I say; en't you got ears? 'Tis all the worse for one like yourself, as no one else would look at, though you tried never so hard to make them; you being such a good-for-nothing baggage, with no thought but for yourself."

Luke watched Grace's retreating figure with critical appraisement, and then returned to his work with a loose chuckle. The incident did not, perhaps, show him in a very favorable light, but it represented an attempt to emphasize the sentence that Fate had already passed on Grace. Luke had resented her transparent efforts to snare Fred, and seeing them frustrated was sufficiently human to betray his perception of the real facts, feeling, indeed, that the course he had taken might prevent Grace from damaging Fred unnecessarily by unfettered inventions of her tongue. All the

same, it must be admitted, that had he originally been less prejudiced against Grace, had their masked guerrilla warfare in the past not existed, it is improbable that he would have looked at the matter from so judicial a point of view.

With impartial curiosity Luke examined every facet of the news. He visited the "Gate," and joined with equal garrulity in the facetious comments of the younger generation and in the reprobation of the few remaining men of an older type, adapting his facile tongue to the policy of the moment, yet never really delivering a single sincere opinion of his own. He interviewed Liddy, who was impervious to his invitations to discuss the matter, and finally accosted Bob himself, whom he met one evening in the street. There again he was checked. However strongly he might feel on such a subject, Bob had no intention of airing his stricken pride.

"'Tis an unfortunit business this here marriage of Fred's," Luke observed, sympathetically.

"Ah, you are right," Bob assented.

"Fred en't the sort you'd have thought would have got a girl into trouble."

" Ah!"

"Still, that Sally sims to be a rare handful of nettles, and maybe all the fault weren't on one side."

"Ah!"

Luke retired discomfited. "Darned if he en't as close as a snail in hes shell!" he muttered to himself,

SHEPHERD'S WARNING

232

while Bob went on his way, annoyed at the persistent curiosity that attended him, masquerading as sympathy. He wanted to be left alone; conversation merely made his perception of his misery the more acute. When he was at work, under a windy sky, in fields familiar as his own cottage, there were times when Sally and all that she stood for seemed unreal and dream-like.

XIV

When Sally's baby was born in that dying village, summer was at hand. Fred had braced himself with misgivings for the first sight of the child of which the world called him father, but the ordeal was surprisingly slight. There lay Sally, pale but tranquil, and to her his heart went out without reserve. The little creature beside her even awoke in him no more aversion than was due to its unfamiliar aspect. Attempt as he might, prompted by clumsy tact, to avoid paying too much attention to the baby, he could not refrain from eyeing it curiously, and wondering how it was that he was able to regard it with such tranquil feelings.

Bob, who was still ignorant of the baby's paternity, studiously ignored the event that had taken place in the cottage, refrained from making even the most perfunctory inquiry after Sally, and when at length she appeared again on the scene did not recognize her recent absence by a word of greeting. His attitude

merely made Sally ignore him in return. When the cottage door was passed, the whole countryside, bright with summer light and summer luxuriance, seemed to welcome her, seemed to force her to feel happy and to ignore the surely fallacious depression that was apt to shroud her thoughts. Why should she concern herself because an old man nursed enmity against her? All that she wanted was to get away from him, to rid herself of an annoying arbiter, to remove her baby from a stealthy espionage that was perhaps injurious and certainly malevolent. But Fred would not leave the cottage. To all Sally's persuasions he retorted that, come what might, he would not leave his "old dad" to fend for himself. It seemed, indeed, that she was likely to be doomed to indefinitely enduring hostility in her own home.

There came an evening, however, when Sally, who was pulling some radishes and spring onions for supper in the garden, heard through the open door a conversation which showed that the old man had abandoned the self-imposed restraint to which he had been subject ever since the afternoon when Fred first had announced his marriage.

"I'm ashamed of you, Fred," he was saying; "you are as poor a sort of blackguard as ever I see. 'Tweren't enough to marry that gal, sims, you must be making yourself as mucky as she. There was a time when I wouldn't have believed it of you. You have brought me low with your games. Durned if I en't

near as much ashamed of myself as I am of you. You have made a mock of me; you and your dirty hussies."

"'Tain't much use saying I'm vexed at it, dad," Fred answered. "But if you knew all, you wouldn't be so hard."

"I don't want to know no more than I am forced to," his grandfather retorted. "Keep your tales for your likes. I have got eyes, en't I?"

"I weren't going to tell you, dad," Fred explained.
"My meaning was that maybe things is not quite as you think."

The conversation tailed away, and Sally, standing in the garden, with a bunch of radishes grasped tightly in her hands, felt furious with Fred at the very fact that he had sacrificed himself to protect her. What did she care? That old man was past bearing, and Fred ought to see it, instead of being so meek and unresentful. She was not going to have it. If Fred tried to protect her, she would protect him. What did a little more mud matter to her, who was already so sadly bespattered? Did she not deserve that additional soiling, in the eyes of the world, at any rate?

Sally waited until Fred was safely out of the way at his work the next afternoon, and then, when his grandfather came home as usual at tea-time and sat down sullenly in the kitchen, she entered the room, and stood confronting him, with a faint flush on her cheeks and very bright eyes.

- "I want to say something to you," she told him.
- "I en't going to have nothing to do with you," the old man answered angrily. "You let me alone, as I let you alone. Don't you start trying to worry me, or maybe you'll be sorry for't."
- "Oh, I know you want nothing to do with me, and I would let you alone, same as I let nettles alone, if 'tweren't that I have something important to tell you."
 - "'Ten't important to me."

Sally ignored his repudiations.

"You think my baby is Fred's," she said. "You are wrong; 'twas nothing to do with he."

Bob started half out of his chair, gripping its arm so shrewdly that the wood started with a loud creak.

- "By God! 'tis too much!" he exclaimed in a low, intense voice. "You are not trying to make out as he's better nor what he is?"
 - "I'm not." Sally's denial was full-voiced.
- "Then you are a dirtier wench nor even I thought. Your father was a murderer, and your mother a whore, and you are a fit daughter to them."

In an exaltation of anger, Bob started to his feet and advanced upon Sally, who, with wide eyes fixed upon him, shrank involuntarily against the wall.

"What do you mean by it? What do you mean? En't you got no shame in you, to snare Fred and curse him with the spawn of your hedge-play? Sims to me the least you can do is to clear out."

The fact that Sally remained impassive and made no reply exasperated him still more.

"Don't you hear what I am saying?" he asked angrily. "You had best go, leave here, and never come back no more."

"But I am married to Fred," Sally protested.

"If you are, what has that got to do with it? It can't be undone this side of the grave. You have crippled the lad for life, the poorer fool he to let you. But you will do less harm if you are away from him. Do you hear?"

"Ah, I hear," Sally answered fiercely, "but I don't take no notice."

The old man's lips were drawn in the extremity of control.

"Don't try me too far," he warned her.

"I won't go, because I want to stay with Fred, and he wants me. Do you really believe what you say? Do you think I have no feelings of my own?"

Sally had regained her poise, and spoke challengingly, almost insolently.

"What do the feelings of the likes of you go for?" Bob retorted scornfully, and then, as if the strain of anger had tried his years too hard, his voice dropped to a quieter, almost petulant tone.

"'Ten't right," he complained. "Why should I have to put up with it? 'Tis not only Fred as is like to suffer; you don't think of me. Why should I stand it?

I little thought I should ever be shamed before all eyes."

"Don't you think 'tis yourself you think of all the time?" Sally suggested dispassionately. "Sims to me you are so full of yourself, you have no time to think of nothing else. You have had your day. When is Fred and us younger folk to have a say?"

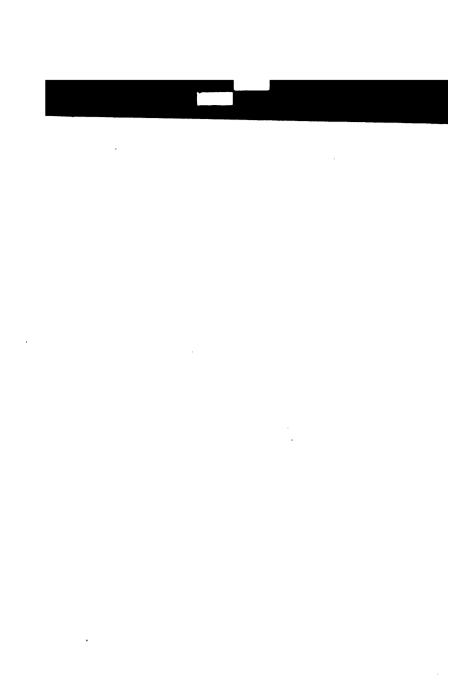
Her shaft told; and the red banners of mortification streamed in the old man's cheeks.

"You are wanting me to ask your pardon and go down on my knees to you," Sally continued. "But I won't. 'Tain't for you nor nobody else to judge me. I have told you what I had to tell, and that's the end on't."

Bob drew himself up to his full height, towering above her.

"I 'lowed you to bide here till now for the sake of the child that was to be born," he told her. "But you will bide no longer. I will have none of your brats, nor you neither. Fred may make his choice; 'tis you or me."

Sally laughed suddenly. How welcome was the sentence! But when the old man had left her, to seek such solace as he might find in the garden, bearing his old fork as if between them there was some intimate sympathy untroubled by human perversities, she climbed the stairs, and, falling on her bed, wept bitterly, her proud spirit daunted by unutterable loneliness.



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FOURTH PART (1910)

I

One afternoon about seven years after Sally's momentous return to Fidding, Tom Garrett emerged from Pricehurst station, with the rather patronizing smile common to those who after a long absence return to once familiar places. He was decidedly pleased to be back, and his heart was full of warm if tardy affection for his family, whom he was about to take by They had no idea of his visit, for while his resolution had fluctuated round a rule that he would write home at least once a year, there had been, as a matter of fact, a period of nearly eighteen months since his last letter, in which he had announced that he expected shortly to be promoted from the rank of gunner to that of bombardier, without giving any indication of the probable date of his return from India, whence he had recently arrived after an absence from England of nearly seven years.

Tom, who was just thirty, was a fine-looking man, a fact of which he was well aware. Indeed, as he stood for a few moments in the station-yard, he managed to exchange visual signals of considerable intimacy with a number of agreeable girls whom he had never before

seen and was unlikely ever to see again, displaying a deft celerity in doing so that was almost automatic. He had inherited his grandfather's tall, spare figure, but army discipline, like the commendable steward, had made the most of the inheritance with which it had been entrusted, and what, in the grandfather, had been merely unrealized potentialities, in the grandson became surprising grace of carriage and physical sufficiency. Standing there in the June sunlight, with tanned face and straight back, Tom looked appetizing to every girl whose eyes fell upon him. And his natural comeliness was emphasized by his blue "walking-out" uniform with broad red stripes down the tight trousers.

But Tom did not linger for long. Turning to a porter, he asked if the old footpath to Fidding was still open.

"Oh, yes, 'tis there still, right enough," was the answer. "But you won't be wanting to climb over he on a day like this. You would best take a tram, or there's a train in twenty minutes."

Tom opened his eyes at this.

"Do you mean to tell me they have got trams out to Fidding?" he asked, "and a station there?"

"Why, there has bin a station, about a mile and a half from old Fidding, these seven years, and 'tis near two years since the trams have run to what they call New Fidding. It must be a tidy time since you was here, if you did not know that,"

"It is better nor seven years since I been there," Tom explained, "and I never had but two or three letters during that time, and they was from my sister what is not much hand at news. I have been in India, you see."

"India! fancy that!" the porter, a youngish man, exclaimed, and, when Tom picked up his bag and walked off, saying he would take a tram, stared thoughtfully after his retreating figure.

"Durned if that en't Tom Garrett! Pity I never thought to ask'n," he said to himself. "Now I call it to mind, I did hear as he went somewhere foreign."

The porter, had Tom known it, was James Rideout's eldest boy, who, like so many others, had drifted into employment in Pricehurst, and had, indeed, done well for himself by getting his present situation after a few years of precarious employment as errand-boy.

Tom, however, had more interesting things than porters to consider. Boarding an electric tram with his bulky bag, he was carried through the town, and then, when he expected to see the open fields beyond the boundary bridge, was startled by a diminishing vista of houses. Even the bridge itself had disappeared, as if the stream had taken fright at the invasion of bricks, and stolen elsewhere; but that it still pursued its old course was shown by a sudden hollow sound, as if the roadway yawned, when the tram passed between the houses where the bridge had formerly stood. The tram sped on with an exhilarating,

undulating movement, at length left behind the orderly rows of little red houses, and passed others of a better sort, that stood back in trim gardens, with their names in beaten copper upon the gates. And then, where the road to Fidding branched off, the tram-lines ended. Leaving the conductor reversing the trolley-pole and trying to beguile the shoe to ride on the overhead wire again, Tom turned briskly towards his home down the street of small shops, which he had last seen as a country lane.

Shops and small houses persisted until away on the right could be seen the more imposing colony of dwellings on the hillside, with their terraced gardens and Then, as if a cloak fell aside, vane-capped garages. that interminable array of brick ended, and the contrasted graciousness of the church, stealthy among trees, and the careless grouping of familiar cottages came into sight, marred only by two or three flatchested villas of a later date. There on the right-hand side was his grandfather's cottage, looking spruce and genial, with a remarkable menagerie of peacocks and other creatures in box-hedging dividing its little garden from the road. There, what was more, was his grandfather, with a pair of shears, clipping away at imaginary imperfections, and pausing now and then to peer through his spectacles at his work with deep absorption, his hands resting on his knees as he did so, his head turning first on one side and then on the other. It was old Bob, right enough, and the sight of him transformed those eight years of absence from an accepted abstraction into an acutely concrete fact.

"Hullo!" said Tom, pausing with his hand on the gate, and awaiting with a smile surprised recognition.

"Hullo to you!" his grandfather replied cautiously, and pulled his spectacles down to the tip of his nose in order to eye the intruder above them. "Be you wanting something?"

"Why, you never mean to say you don't know me!" Tom exclaimed. "I am Tom, just back from India, and come down to see you!"

"Ah! you are Tom, are ye? You will be my Sam's eldest."

"What has happened to you, dad? Aren't Fred and Liddy still here? Don't you remember me as lived with you since I was a nipper till I 'listed eight years back?"

"Ah, they are still here," his grandfather conceded, and then, after a long pause, his memory flooded back. "Why, 'course you are! Fancy my not remembering, lad! Mind you? Of course I do! Well, fancy you turning up like this so sudden, without so much as a wink before'and. My memory do play me sad tricks nowadays, to be sure. Ah, well, the years en't likely to go back'ards, so I mustn't complain. But change! Why, I would hardly ha' knowed you!"

Tom smiled at this ingenuous remark, and with a facility very much unlike his old self hastened to say the right thing.

SHEPHERD'S WARNING

244

"If it weren't for they gig-lamps of yours, dad, I would say you never looked younger. You are the lad! Still working at Bentwood, are you?"

"No, I en't worked there for some time," the old man admitted rather sadly, but the faint cloud was succeeded by bright garrulity. "I am getting my Lloyd George money, you see; and Lid and Fred they both give me a hand now and agen, and I don't do so bad, what with one thing and another. Why, you would hardly believe how busy I am. There's a lot of little jobs only waiting to be done now."

Tom let him chatter on, and then, when he had made sure that his grandfather had no objection to his staying with him, carried his bag into the kitchen.

"Still the same," he said contentedly, as he surveyed the print of Queen Victoria, and its companions, the clock, and all the long-forgotten objects that, seen again, brought back the past so vividly that his whole period in the army seemed to have no more substance than a dream. "What is this? New, ain't it?" he asked, his eye lighting on a photograph over the chimney-piece.

"Ah, 'tis me with my old team. 'Twas Mr. Mason as had it took before he left," his grandfather answered with mingled pride and regret. Crossing the room with Tom, he looked wistfully at the aging figure which stood at the head of the team, and seemed to him so enviably strong and young. "That one be Prince that you'll mind well enough. Many's the ride

you have had on hes back when you and the others was youngsters," he said, indicating the horse with a knotted finger. "Beauty be that one, and this here is Daisy. 'Twas only when the ground was reg'lar heavy we would have the three, or maybe when we was deep ploughing for carrots and the like."

Even Tom, whom the army had omitted to provide with imagination, felt the pathos of the moment, and, after a sympathetic grunt, changed the subject by referring again to his brother and sister.

"Liddy is living in Farthing's old cottage, ain't she?" he asked.

"Ah, you will find her there, she and her three youngsters. Coming on, the eldest is."

"And Fred, ain't he spliced yet?"

"Ah, dear, yes, and bin these I dunno how many years—five or six maybe. But his missus and me don't have much to say to each other."

"Why, what's wrong with her? Who was it he married?"

"I knowed all along how 'twould be. Treated me shameful she did, when she were here. Thought of nothing but 'twas herself. Still, what more could you expect of a one like she?"

Tom repeated his question as to the identity of this evilly-disposed creature, but his grandfather was too much intent upon what had become traditional grievances to pay any attention beyond conceding a parenthetical, "You know her well enough."

SHEPHERD'S WARNING

246

- "Well, where do they live?" Tom asked at length.
- "Oh, down at Snowball's old house. A reg'lar mucky place it is, I'll lay, though I en't set foot in it—and don't mean to, neither. 'Twas a reg'lar good job when they cleared out of here. I bin on my own since then, with none of this being thought as I was a nuisance in my own house."
- "Well, I will just step along and pass the time of day with Liddy and Fred," Tom said.
- "You en't likely to find Fred at home, not before 'tis pretty nigh dark. He's doing wonderful well at this gardening of hes."
- "I heard about it from Liddy in one of her letters," Tom declared rather hastily, foreseeing endless explanations if he remained silent. "Well, see you later!"
- "That's it," his grandfather agreed, and hobbled to the gate with him, to watch the retreating figure with still slightly doubtful curiosity.

TT

When Tom reached the crest of the slope opposite the church, he saw for the first time the roofs of houses along the Belhanger road, where formerly ran the fields of Bentwood Farm. "Cripes! more houses!" he murmured to himself. "London ain't in it with Fidding!" Walking on, with his eye on Liddy's cottage, he heard on his left in the garden of a cottage a voice singing with a childlike sweetness, but, although he did not realize it, an entire incapacity to keep to one key. Looking over the hedge, he saw a figure which so startled him that, for the moment, he forgot that it was this particular cottage in which his grandfather had told him that Fred was living.

"By the Powers, 'tis Sally!" he exclaimed aloud.

Sally it was, in a pale pink overall, looking, at a first glance, astonishingly unchanged, although, after a moment, he realized that both pale face and slender figure, in some unobtrusive, indefinable way, were matured. Her mobility of poise was softened and sobered. She stood definitely stationary, not, as in the past, in a purely transitory suspense of motion, like that of a feather held by complex currents hovering in the air. Her eyes were still passionate, but their fevers were riper and less unschooled. Without perceiving these rather subtle changes, Tom realized that Sally was, on second thoughts, somehow altered, and, in her new state, she seemed to his own changed self even more provokingly attractive than in the fevered days gone by.

With a nervous gesture, with which Tom was soon to become familiar, Sally swept an imaginary wisp of hair from her forehead, and regarded him with self-contained recognition.

"'Pon my word, if it isn't Tom!" she exclaimed.

"Well, you have changed! Quite the dandy, you've become!"

If Sally expected that beneath the transformed exterior there still remained the inarticulate spirit she had known in the past, she was to be surprised. While still by no means subtle, Tom was a great deal more sophisticated than he had been in the old days.

"Well, I can't say you have changed so much yourself, Sally," he retorted. "You look as young and pretty as ever you did."

"I am sure I am obliged!" Sally responded mockingly. "But, you see, I'm only twenty-six, so gray hairs is hardly to be expected."

"But what are you doing here?" Tom asked. "I never expected to see you in Fidding."

"Don't you know who lives here?"

"No, I can't say I — Why, if it ain't where dad said Fred was fixed up! You don't mean to tell me ——"

"That I'm your sister-in-law? But I do. You bide a bit," Sally said, and called lightly, "Charley! Freddy!"

In response to her summons, two small boys, aged about six and four, appeared in sight, their possible natural beauty tempered by grievously unwiped noses and the impress of sticky black hands on cheeks and forehead.

"These your youngsters?" Tom inquired, slightly incredulous. He stared rather uneasily at the children,

determined not to display familiarity that might entail kisses. "I can see the likeness to Fred," he admitted, after examining the boys' faces. "At least, this bigger chap is like Fred. I don't see much likeness in the younger."

- "Ah, the bigger one is Charley. He's my eldest."
- "He's the spit of Fred," Tom declared, feeling that he had said the right thing, and could not do better than repeat such a fortunate inspiration.
- "You think so?" Sally asked, and suddenly stooping, proceeded to wipe the child's face with her overall. "You dirty little scob, you!" she said severely. "How many more times have I got to tell you to keep them messy puds off your face!"

She rose at last with her face flushed, as if from the effort of stooping.

It was not long before Tom postponed his intention of going to see Liddy. Entering the garden, he insisted on helping Sally to take in the washing that hung on the line, by following her with an old zinc wash-tub. He enjoyed himself thoroughly, affecting condescending amusement at his occupation, and wasting no opportunity of trading on past familiarity in order to create an atmosphere of indefinite but intimate sympathy between himself and Sally, who, receiving his overtures passively, or, at the most, with derisive protests, betrayed the fact that she was conscious of unadmitted emotions by the wavering flush on her cheeks and a new brilliance in her eyes. Yet, on

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Tom's part, at any rate, this emotional offensive was merely the automatic reaction of habit in the presence of an agreeable girl: and Sally, whatever her secret feelings, was sufficiently detached to keep an eye on the children, who were busy scratching the cinders on the path into untutored designs.

At length Sally had taken down all the washing, and, giving Tom no invitation to enter the cottage, insisted on retrieving the wash-tub, which she rested on her hip, with one hand grasping its outer edge. Sweeping again that imaginary tress from her forehead, she called to the two children, and waited for Tom to take the hint and go. But as she stood there, Fred, arriving home, opened the gate, with a puzzled glance at the tall figure in uniform beside his wife.

"Why, if it en't Tom!" he exclaimed delightedly, as his brother turned at the sound of footfalls at the gate. "You're a sight for sore eyes. "Tis little I expected to be seeing you to-night, Tom. Why, I had no idea but that you was still down in India."

Fred, who must needs produce in his mind some pictorial representation of such abstractions as remote countries, had a very clear image in his mind of India hanging, with peculiar insecurity, somewhere on the slope of the world beneath him.

Past differences were forgotten, by Fred at any rate, and he, who once had been so infinitely the more subtle of the two, was made to seem ingenuously demonstrative by Tom's acquired armor of reserve, which, forged

by his experience, at once protected him, and disguised the calibre of his mind.

Leaving the two brothers talking, Sally went indoors, and, as she worked in the kitchen, listened to the voices in the garden, one soft and restrained, the other obtrusive and opinionated. Now and again, when she crossed the room, she paused to glance out of the little window, with its bright flower-box, her eyes lingering on Tom with a remote and speculative glance.

III

At this time Sally was as happy as she had ever been in her life, for the moods of restless discontent that from time to time shook her, making her turn upon Fred with fierce impatience, were trivial compared with the fierce tempests of concrete trouble that during nearly all her life had buffeted her almost beyond endurance. She had plunged into marriage largely in a spirit of apathetic recklessness, expecting little, trying merely to find a solution for the difficulties of the moment, even if upon that solution greater complexities were imminent. Until her baby was born, she had been too spiritless to take active interest in her fortunes, and had passed her days in a state of mental suspense. But as her spirit revived, she was forced to realize that Bob Garrett's outbursts were the evidence

not merely of a transitory spleen, but of an obstinate and unvielding prejudice that fed upon itself, gaining strength with every fresh demonstration of Sally's youth and reviving spirit. For a time, life had been almost intolerable to her, but she had not tamely accepted defeat, had met his offensive with an offensive more bitter and less scrupulous than his own. her fierce independence, however, she had realized, not forlornly but bitterly, that she stood indeed alone; for Fred, with sympathy too spiritless to develop into championship, could not be regarded as an ally of any practical use. Liddy, who with such generous restraint, at first had stretched out a helping if unimpassioned hand, had soon withdrawn it, and, without realizing Sally's difficulties, had accused her of neglecting the old man in whose cottage she lived. There had been some bitter scenes, in which Sally with warped pride had refused to defend herself, merely increasing the hostility of her sister-in-law by rather subtle provo-Of course, in reality, Sally had not a chance of doing anything to make Bob comfortable; he would have nothing to do with her or her works, even ate the meals she had prepared only under protest, and because there was no choice except starvation.

That was not the only cause of disputes. Both Liddy and her grandfather had developed their prejudice against the new order of things in the village into a cult which so obsessed them that they could regard no newcomers to the place without keen prejudice and

Sally, on the other hand, having none but unpleasant memories of the time that her new connections so unreservedly extolled, considered the decay of the old order as a kindly dispensation, and regarded the remaining remnants of the original village with distaste, longing for the entire place to be rooted out. like an old tooth too corrupt to preserve. To her, the new Fidding seemed eminently attractive. She loved the bright, new cottages, lavished appreciative glances on the rows of shops that had been built near the station, and spent a good deal of her time staring through plate-glass at merchandise which she longed for, but could not afford to possess. It was only natural that such a girl as she, whose upbringing had been largely in the hands of chance, was a novice in domestic economy, and it cannot be denied that at times she succumbed to small temptations that made depredations upon the household purse, and left her with insufficient money to provide what was required during the week. Yet she spent little, if any, more upon herself than did Liddy, but, being unskilled, needed more for the household expenses than did her experienced sisterin-law.

Sally's sacrilegious attitude towards the village, and her fondness for looking upon life through shop windows, were of course magnified into sins of the first degree. Sally was extravagant, neglected her husband's interests for more frivolous things; she was this and she was that, but, in reality, perhaps she did not

SHEPHERD'S WARNING

254

show sufficient meekness and gratitude for being allowed to exist at all, she, whose origin and nature alike were reprehensible.

There is no doubt that, if she had shown more tact in her behavior, Sally might have overcome the prejudice of which she was the object. But unfortunately she did not feel called upon to be tactful. It was far more natural to her to meet criticism with criticism than to accept it philosophically. And her whole nature was against her. She awoke hostility in women who otherwise would scarcely have been aware of her existence. No woman, at any rate, could have overlooked the peculiar neatness and smartness of her appearance. It was an accepted fact, almost a necessary evidence of modesty, in married women that they should become to a great extent careless of their appearance, but Sally was no sooner secure with husband and home than she began to give license to her instinctive craving to appear attractive. What she lacked in household skill she possessed in deftness with her clothing, and without necessarily spending more on her dress than any other young woman in the place, she contrived always to look well, and was always ready to face the world. There was for her no need for the law that friends might not visit a woman except after giving notice, or on a Sunday; she was ready for them at any time-merely had to whip off an overall to appear at her best. Sally was never to be seen on Saturday with her fringe hideous in mechanically

devised convolutions: she had no fringe, but arranged her hair every day with the same freedom, a fact that in itself was translated into a symbol of loose conduct. With her cheap but presentable blouse and skirt, and "town" boots, Sally was eyed with bitter reprobation. No one like her, surely, could keep her husband's cottage clean and comfortable! But in that instance Sally's interests were at one with Fred's. He was proud of her appearance, realized quite well—and told her so—that no other girl nearer than Pricehurst looked so natty as she, and was not aware of any discomforts in his house to set against the satisfaction he found in regarding her.

It was not until Sally's first child was six months old that she and Fred moved from Bob Garrett's cottage. It had been difficult enough to find a house that was both vacant and cheap, but they eventually secured their present cottage after the opportune death of Tom Snowball, its original occupant.

It was really no more than a band-box, but they had to pay for it an increased rent of five shillings a week, a sum made more serious by the fact that, in addition, Fred afterwards had to contribute a small weekly sum to help his grandfather when the latter retired from work on an Old Age Pension in 1909. The move, however, made life more tolerable for Sally, and not long after they were settled, Grace Pertwood, her most savage critic, managed to marry the assistant at a multiple grocer's shop near the station, and moved to the

256

outskirts of Pricehurst, which also made things better. Fred, however, for a time had great difficulty in meeting expenses in the new home. In addition to giving monetary help to his grandfather he had to subsidize his old friend and partner, Luke Medlar, who lingered in his cottage for nearly two years after he became incapable of doing any work. Always rapacious, Luke's rapacity became intolerably aggravated by having nothing to do but blackmail Fred, who readily admitted a moral obligation that became increasingly exacting. And even when Luke at length succumbed to bronchitis, Fred's relief at the cessation of the drain on his purse was tempered by the discovery that at least half the money wrung out of him by the old man had remained untouched, only to be triumphantly retrieved from its hiding-place in Luke's mattress by a carrion sister who arrived with almost miraculous promptitude to ransack the cottage for booty. Nevertheless, Luke's death made a great difference, and after it Fred and Sally felt comparatively prosperous.

About three years after her marriage, Sally had a second child, and both children when they grew into small boys began to find their way into their grandfather's heart. He, whose memory every year grew more uncertain, did not realize the peculiarity of the fact that of the two children he preferred the elder, that ill-starred baby whose advent had been prefaced by so much distress. But in spite of the gathering mists of age, Bob's aversion for his daughter-in-law

remained. For long intervals he forgot precisely what it was he disliked about her, but he never forgot his dislike. And so surely as he saw her approach down the street he retired hastily indoors, growling to himself.

His dislike of her remained, but had he been pressed. it is improbable that he would have been able to support it except with the criticisms of her appearance and tastes that Liddy did not fail to repeat to him. though these criticisms were based on exaggerated estimates, could it be truly said that they were wholly unmerited? Was it not possible that in seizing upon failings that in themselves did not justify the censure meted out, Sally's critics did actually, intuitively, recognize something as being wrong, even if they diagnosed it incorrectly? Even if that were so, it was not necessarily a case for censure. Sally was certainly temperamentally out of tune with her surroundings. There was in her composition an exotic streak, diluted perhaps, but still influential, for which she could not be held accountable. She could not herself diagnose the trouble; all she knew was that, in spite of ameliorated conditions during recent years, she was still at enmity with Fate, was still restless, tortured, at times, by a feeling of baffled impulse. She found life at its best insipid, craved for novelty and stimulation which were to be found in her experience only in love-making and the theatre.

Fred, who had himself no such desire, could scarcely

ever be persuaded to leave home in the evenings, so that the galleries of the music halls and theatre in Pricehurst were unattainable, and Sally was forced to try to appease her hungry spirit by insipid eyeflirtations—when she was at a safe distance from the cottage-which she never allowed to develop into anything tangible, not for want of enterprise but because she had a real sense of obligation to Fred, and was attached to him quite genuinely, although perhaps not Tom's return and the veiled passage in irrevocably. the garden had been momentous and stirring events in her unexciting life. She had no intention of encouraging Tom, but was really quite incapable of withstanding the temptation to see whether she could still bring him to heel. It was a problem of an academic interest, the purity of which was perhaps not quite unsullied, although she never would have admitted the fact, even to herself.

IV

Tom had not been long in the village before Liddy changed the rôle of receptive sympathizer and admiring sister for that of active instigator. There were a number of questions in the satisfactory solution of which a new influence like Tom might prove invaluable. The most pressing problem was her grand-

father. Having beguiled Tom in to tea one afternoon, therefore, she tried to stir him into active interest. She had no difficulty in bringing the subject of conversation round to the old man, and directly Tom referred to the way he was aging, she pounced upon the opportunity.

"That he is," she agreed. "You have seen for yourself the way I have to look after'm. In and out all day, I am, and don't get no thanks for it, neither. All he does is to say how independent he is, and I do believe he thinks 'tis true. I wish he would leave his old house and come to us. You don't know what it means. 'Tis not only the work, but there's the money we give him, and it don't get no less. What with the children and one thing and another, and him on top of it, 'tis a wonder to me how we do manage, I'm sure. Don't you think you could do something, Tom?"

"What is it you want me to do?" Tom asked, with an uneasy feeling that perhaps he ought to contribute monetary aid.

"I mean, don't you think as you could try and persuade him to come to us?"

"Haven't you said anything to him yourself?"

"That I have, but he is that obstinate! He says he have lived where he is all his life, and he en't going to change now for nobody."

"If you ask me, you had best leave him be," Tom said, dimly realizing that the task Liddy was insinuating upon him might be more troublesome than it sounded.

"'Tis easy enough to talk—you don't know!"
Liddy retorted. "How would you like it, I wonder?
Do you think we want to stay here forever? I don't see how we can make a move so long as dad is alive."

"It is the first I have heard of you wanting to."

"That may be, but 'tis true. George is like me—can't abide Fidding as it be. I weren't made to live in what is no better nor a town, no more nor George was. And he would better himself if once he could get away. Things en't what they used to be at Bentwood. 'Tis reg'lar provoking to be set here, where 'tis your hand in your pocket from morning to night—and such trash as they give you at these here Co-op.'s and the rest of them! They en't got no nourishment in them; and do you think it is going to do the children any good to be shut up among a lot of houses? When you do have air, have it fresh, is what I say. If you ask me, the reason why my little Doreen is so peaky is because of all the rubbishy stuff they sell you at the shops. That's how 'tis, 'pend upon it."

"If you was to ask me, the place ain't any the worse for having a bit of life in it," Tom retorted.

"Why, you are almost as bad as Fred's Sally! She is the one for talking that way. Suits her book well enough, I dessay. How she finds time to go brivetting about, wasting her money in them shops, is more than I know. "Tis Fred suffers for it, right enough.

She is too fine for what she got to do, that's about how 'tis. She thinks the world of herself. I wonder she has got the nerve to carry on the way she do, being what she is. And, what is more, I have always thought there was something queer about that first baby of hers."

"What do you mean?" Tom inquired with reviving interest.

"Oh, I don't know; maybe 'twas just fancy. However, just see if you can't say a word to dad, same as I suggested, Tom; do now!"

But Liddy's plea was unavailing.

"I don't hardly see it would help much. You can take it from me, that you would best let him alone," Tom rejoined, and having bestowed a little perfunctory attention on Liddy's children, set off for the "Gate," where he meant to show the natives how to drink. On the way he passed Fred's cottage, and his pace perceptibly slackened. But Sally was not to be seen. The only sign of life was a querulous wail of a child, that continued with unimaginative monotony of tone until it faded out of earshot.

Tom was disappointed. He had contrived to see a good deal of Sally during the week he had spent in Fidding. Not only did her presence enliven what otherwise might have been a tedious visit, but it was so attractive that, before he had been in the place two days, he congratulated himself on the fact that he had not disclosed his original intention of staying only one

262 SHEPHERD'S WARNING

more day. With a comfortable accumulation of foreign service leave to draw upon, it was possible for him to remain for some time, and he began to think that perhaps the whole of his leave might be spent at Fidding as enjoyably as anywhere else. Sally, he decided, was a little devil, and little devils had to be dealt with. That was the version of his attitude with which he supplied himself. In reality he was snared by her. She was so tantalizing, so provoking. At times there was no difficulty in making the most agreeable progress with her, in developing what seemed likely to be a charming, wholly ephemeral intrigue. But then, wantonly, and ruthlessly, Sally would allow herself to slide down the ascent up which he had so carefully escorted her, and from firm ground below would survey with unconcealed amusement his increasingly unpleasant position, unaided on the heights. Where Sally slid, with enjoyable composure, Tom was able to climb down only in a most undignified manner. Without understanding her process, he realized her superior mental agility, but the more foolish she made him look the more determined he was to get the ultimate laugh.

Tom was, indeed, rapidly reaching a condition in which he could not have a moment's peace unless Sally was within reach. He had not sufficient subtlety to be able to evoke her presence mentally, and so in her absence enjoy the thought of her. It followed that his only sedative was her actual presence. All that after-

noon, while he was with Liddy, his mind had been far more engrossed with the possibility of seeing Sally on his way home than with the conversation in which he was taking part. Yet, disappointed as he was by seeing no visible sign of her, he realized the undesirability of ascertaining whether the child's outcry that he heard was a clue to her whereabouts, knowing well enough that he had already hung about the cottage quite enough in Fred's absence, and that one visit too many might set the hounds of scandal barking. He had no wish for that.

Before he reached the "Gate," however, his disconsolate spirit was roused by a figure which he saw approaching from the distance. In a few moments he recognized Sally, his eyes confirming his hopes. There was at any rate no possible objection to speaking to his sister-in-law when he met her in the street.

"I heard one of your youngsters singing out as I passed your place just now," he told her, " and I never thought but what you was there."

"Well, you see, you was wrong," Sally retorted. "And I suppose you are thinking I didn't ought to leave them."

- "I wasn't thinking anything about it."
- "But they are quite all right."
- "Of course they are."

"Even if they weren't able to look after themselves, I couldn't always be dragging the poor things about with me."

264 SHEPHERD'S WARNING

"I suppose you couldn't," Tom agreed, wondering rather why Sally was making so much business out of a casual remark. He did not realize that she was putting up a defense against acutely suspected accusations by others.

"I can't always be at home," Sally continued. "I am only human, after all. "Ten't that I am not fond of my kiddies. I dessay I am as fond as many that makes more song about it." A dusky flush showed an embarrassment that she hastened to overcome by adding, "Perhaps 'tis that I haven't been so stuck all in one place as some. I do want to see a bit of life, and that's a fact. But Fred, he never feels like going out. He always says he is too busy, or else he is tired. He don't never sim to think it may be dull for me stuck in the one place, day in, day out."

Sally paused contemplatively, and then added with a carefully colorless voice, "'Tain't as if I had a lot of friends."

"Blinking lot of ill-natured cattle they are hereabouts, if you ask me," Tom retorted, adding with a feeling of infinite subtlety, "Still it don't sim to have hurt you much, not judging by your looks."

"Oh, dear! I'm only an old married woman—a reg'lar old gal I'm getting," Sally answered lightly, avoiding his eyes with a slight smile.

"You are too good for Fidding, that is about the long and short of it," Tom declared, with a discreet and intimate drop in tone. "What is more, you are

too good for Fred. Not that he is a bad chap, but he is not up to one of your style, Sally."

"Well, I might have done worse," Sally retorted tranquilly. "I might have had you."

Tom was discomfited, and Sally apparently untouched. Yet even the most clumsy shot sometimes scores, and for whatever reason, when Fred came home that night Sally was curiously elusive and detached.

V

It was not until Tom had been enjoying the indescribable atmosphere in the bar at the "Gate" for some time that he realized the magnificent opening provided by Sally's apologia. He would step into the place of the unready Fred and give her a really good time in Pricehurst one evening. A meal in some restaurant possessing at any rate an off-license, and at the same time not too ambitious for ease, followed by a visit to the music hall, would be the very thing to induce matters to develop beyond their present rather unsatisfactory position. Although only a very crude judge of temperament, he felt confident that Sallywould become more responsive under a treatment which in his own experience had transformed girls far more stolid than she. But the difficulty was how to get Sally without Fred, and how to avoid offending

SHEPHERD'S WARNING

266

Liddy by not inviting her in preference to Sally. In any case, it was undesirable to offend Liddy; it was doubly undesirable in that it would predispose her to acute criticism of others. Tom had not lived in barracks for nothing, nor had married quarters for him been objects merely of architectural interest.

It was a ticklish problem to solve, but it was not Tom's way to concentrate his faculties upon such matters; he left them to simmer in his mind, as it were, and usually found that in due course some expedient presented itself. That method did not fail him in the present instance, and the next morning, having fortified his diplomacy at the "Gate," he visited Liddy.

"I was thinking that, as my time is getting short, it would be a good way of winding up if you and George and Fred and his Sally all was to come along to the Palace one night," he said, trying to temper his urgency without seeming too discouraging. "Of course it would make rather a late night of it, but it would only be once in a way."

"'Tis very kind of you, Tom, I'm sure," Liddy answered, "but they places aren't much in my line. 'Sides, Sally and me don't have much to do with each other."

"Well, I can't hardly leave her out, else Fred would get huffy."

"Oh, 'ten't only that. You see, I couldn't hardly spare the time, and what do you think I would do with these youngsters of mine all that time?"

"I suppose there is someone as would keep an eye on them."

"There is plenty would take my youngsters, of course, but I en't particular fond of leaving them to other folks, if I can help it. Some do, but 'ten't my way."

"Well, I won't press you," Tom replied unselfishly.
"'Twas only a notion of mine."

"I dare say Sally would be ready enough," Liddy suggested. "She is ready enough to leave they poor mites of hers. They are used to being alone by now."

"Very likely," Tom agreed, adding—superb inspiration!—" It ain't what she would like, though, it is what Fred likes. I doubt if he will be over-anxious. Still, I may as well see what he says. It would do him good to be shook up a bit. He is getting stodgy, if you ask me."

Tom left, casting for the first time a grateful eye upon Liddy's eldest girl—Mabel—an awkward child with straight, almost colorless hair, and pale eyes like a sheep, who had stared at him during his visit with unembarrassed absorption. As he walked down the road to call on Sally, he threw back his shoulders with a feeling of exhilaration, braced by the initial success his diplomacy had scored, a success indubitable to his mind, even if he conceded that circumstances had been to a certain extent favorable in themselves.

He found Sally up to her elbows in a wash-tub, with

a head on it like that on a gigantic glass of beer, and disclosed his plan, offhandedly, whacking his neat leg meanwhile with his whangee cane.

"What is the use of asking, when you know as well as I do that Fred won't go?" Sally said reproachfully, when he concluded.

"Well, even if he won't go, what is to prevent you coming?" Tom asked. "I should think he would be only too glad to give you a chance of getting out for once in a way."

"He might," Sally conceded, averting her eyes that usually were so ready and courageous.

To her the air seemed in an instant to have become charged with disturbing forces.

"Shall I ask him, then?" Tom inquired, his cane now idle.

There was a curiously long silence, and then Sally's eyes again met his unemotionally.

"I will put it to him myself," she said. "Perhaps he will come, after all. You never know. He is very fond of music. I've seen him stand listening to the barrel-organs till you would think he had got stuck."

Her laugh cleared the atmosphere, seemed to dispel some lethargic influence.

"Fred always was a queer card," Tom agreed. "Still, even if he don't feel keen, you will come yourself, won't you, Sally?"

"I don't know so much about that. What is going to happen to my kiddies?"

- "Blame these kids!" Tom thought, adding aloud, "If Fred don't come, he can keep an eye on them."
 - "I suppose he could. Well, I will think it over."
- "Now, Sally, do say you will come—for the sake of old times."
 - "What have they got to do with it?"
 - "Oh, well, I don't know ——"
- "Of course you don't. Well, you had best be off, or I shall never get my washing done."

Tom was retreating doubtfully, when Sally called to him.

- "What is it?" he asked, returning.
- "I thought I might as well say I meant to come, all along," Sally explained, with challenging eyes.

That evening Tom intercepted Liddy on her way to the grocer's.

- "You have been and let me in for a nice thing," he said.
 - "I have? What have I done?"
- "Why, I went over to ask Fred and Sally, as you suggested, and old Fred says he don't care about going, but he as good as asked me to take Sally by herself."
- "I don't see why that should make you uneasy," Liddy retorted with veiled watchfulness.
- "Well, from what you told me she seems a bit of a handful."
- "I should have thought you would have knowed her by this time well enough yourself."
 - "It's a rum start," Tom said evasively.

SHEPHERD'S WARNING

"I dare say I could manage to come, if you like ——"

"Oh, no, I wouldn't think of worrying you, what with your youngsters and all. I dare say we shall find something to talk about, all right," Tom answered hastily.

"I dare say you will."

270

Liddy's voice was quite innocent in tone, and Tom returned, winking to himself. "I have settled old Lid all right," he thought exultantly.

VI

Next day, it was not until late in the afternoon that Liddy was able to go over to tidy up her grandfather's cottage. It was a golden day, with a waver of heat above the white dusty roadway, and the metallic mass of the elms round the church looked almost sinister in its immobility. While she was busy in the house, her grandfather pottered about in his garden on leisurely and apparently aimless errands, from one side to the other, enjoying the heat that made his face stream with perspiration, and now and again addressing a few words to his fat tabby cat, which was curled up on the water-butt, with paws turned in, blinking slowly in an ecstasy of lethargy, and scarcely interested even in the birds which from time to time came under the survey of the somnolent eyes in her whiskered face.

"Now, Jinny, old gal, we'll be having to heave you off afore long," her master explained rather apologetically. "I am thinking of giving my shallots just a shatter of water, so soon as the sun's off 'em."

He confronted the cat with affectionate eyes, and wiped his forehead with his lean forearm.

"Oh, there is no call to be in such a hurry," he added. "You have your snooze out, old gal. I'll let you know when I wants to be moving you."

But the cat uncurled, stood up, stretched with arching back, gave a gnat-like sneeze, and poised for a moment in a suspended spring, and then, jumping daintily to the ground, wound ingratiatingly about her master's legs.

"Now, Jinny, none of your games! You've had your dinner, and if you feel peckish, there is plenty of little fat sparrers as only want catching. 'Tis lazy you are getting. Be off with you!" Bob said, smiling over the sycophant's head at Liddy, who emerged from the cottage, rolling down her sleeves.

"Oh, you and your cats!" she exclaimed. "If you ask me, 'tis the cat keeps you, and not you the cat."

"So be it," her grandfather agreed genially. "I don't know what Jinny would do without me to wait on her, and have a chat now and again. She's a reg'-lar gossip, Jinny is."

As they chatted thus, Liddy saw Tom and Sally approaching down the road. Tom, who was always resplendent, looked much as usual, except for a slight

increase in jauntiness and self-satisfaction, but Sally, as Liddy's critical eye at once detected, was dressed with unusual care, and her face and eyes testified to suppressed vivacity and excitement.

"There goes Tom and that gal off to Pricehurst," Liddy remarked tentatively.

"'Tis little enough I see of Tom," her grandfather declared. "He is like the lot of them—must be having what he calls a good time. I don't hold with all this junketing, nor never did. And that gal! What is he always after her for, I would like to know?"

Liddy, with frank lack of tact, watched the two as they passed, her scrutiny producing in Tom red embarrassment, although Sally, after a single glance of tepid recognition, held her chin a little higher, with determined audacity.

"I wouldn't go so far as to say he is always after her," Liddy made the qualification invitingly, "but it do sim as if they git on well enough together."

"Ah! you are right;" her grandfather raised her expectations by pausing for a moment, and then dashed them by spitting forcefully on the ground, in dismissal of the topic. "I had best be getting the pail to give they shallots a doing," he said, and hobbled away, leaving Liddy to see herself off the premises.

For a time, however, Liddy irresolutely lingered, but when the old man returned with a pail of water, and began the delicate operation of spilling tempered splashes on his plants, with entire absorption in the operation, she turned decisively, and, leaving behind her an irritable "Good-night," went home to cast a repressive eye on her children. Having made sure that they were harmlessly engaged—Doreen battering at snail-shells with large stones, while the others admired the process—Liddy slipped across to catch Fred while he was at his tea, for which usually he managed to get home.

He was there, very brown and hot, sitting in his shirt-sleeves, with the shirt itself open to show his pale breast. But, while his teacup steamed neglected on the table, he was busy with a pair of pliers, twisting wire into what looked like a small bird-cage.

"Now then, Fred, get on with your tea!" Liddy told him. "What in the world are you playing at?"

"'Tis only a notion of mine for a new sort of fork," Fred explained. "Like your fingers and thumb a bit drawn together, 'twill be. Of course it won't be made of wire, though. I am only having a try, to see how 'twould go; experimenting like."

"You and your tries! You are always up to some game. You aren't no more fit to be left by yourself than they youngsters of yours is. Where are they?"

"They are all right—out at the back somewhere, I reckon."

"What are you going to do with them after tea?"

"I am keeping an eye on them myself. I have done for to-day. I told Sally I would look to them."

SHEPHERD'S WARNING

"Well, if you have done, why didn't you go, too?"

"I don't hardly know, but 'twas only because Sally and Tom was going to be out as I come home."

"Well, get on with your tea, do, while I see what they boys is up to."

Liddy disappeared with an air of capable determination, which vanished, however, when she found the two children engaged with suspicious silence and intensity upon some recondite investigation at the bottom of the garden. Having given each of them a physical shake-up, on principle, and stimulated them by an appearance of sincere interest in their affairs, she returned to Fred, who was obediently, if absently, eating his tea.

"I only just looked in to see as you was all right, really," Liddy lied.

"Oh, I am all right: don't you worry about me," Fred assured her. "Though 'twas good of you to think of it."

"How long is Tom staying?" Liddy inquired, as if casually.

"I don't rightly know; though he said something about being off before long, and as this evening was a sort of a wind-up, like."

"He and your Sally sims to get on all right."

"So they do."

274

"They always did, when you come to think." Fred looked up doubtfully, and eyed the speaker.

"What are you getting at, Lid?"

"Me getting at? Why, nothing. I only passed the remark."

"Ah, but something must have put it into your head."

Liddy impulsively decided for candor.

"If you was to ask me," she said, "I should advise you not to take things too much for granted. There is them as says that Sally and Tom have seen a deal more of each other nor what you know. And you mind how 'twas between them once. If I had ha' bin you, they wouldn't have gone off together as they did to-day."

- "Who has been putting you up to this, Liddy?"
- "Well, I en't blind myself, if it comes to that."
- "You can be easy in your mind, Lid. I have knowed about it all along, and I dessay I know the rights of it better than you do."

Liddy felt rather exasperated by his density, but retained a tone of quiet insistence.

"That is just like you, Fred. You never see no harm in nobody. You think they two just went off by chance, because none of us could go with them. But it wasn't chance; 'twas all thought out beforehand."

"I know 'twas."

"You know!" Liddy exclaimed. "Then why, in the name of goodness, haven't you done nothing about it?"

Under her gaze of exasperated astonishment Fred

turned red, and nervously picked up from the floor the wire upon which he had been working.

"Well, you are a masterpiece, I must say!" Liddy exclaimed. "Sitting there playing with your bits of wire——! Haven't you enough courage to speak to Tom, is that how 'tis?"

"No," Fred said slowly, "'tis nothing to do with Tom. But you wouldn't understand, not if I was to tell you."

"That is likely enough," Liddy retorted sarcastically. "I am beginning to think you a poor sort of specimen, Fred, I must say."

"You wouldn't see things as I do, even if I was to tell you," Fred repeated, distressed.

"Oh, well, do as you will. I am sure 'tis nothing to do with me. Anyone would think —— But there! I won't say no more. 'Tis no good trying to make a cat walk back'ards, if he's set against it."

When Liddy had gone, Fred felt that the attitude he had taken up had not improved matters. But what else could he have done? His sister's intervention was unsought by him, the rebuff she had received was her own fault; but he knew well enough that she would not realize the fact, and that, instead, she would blame him as much as if he had intentionally led her on in order to snub her. All Liddy had done, so far as he was concerned, was to increase his uneasiness by confirming fears that he had attempted to dissemble to himself. He felt very miserable after she had left,

wandered to and fro, and made desperate but ineffective efforts to compel himself to do something practical. How little Liddy knew her sister-in-law! how little he really knew her himself! His knowledge really was confined to an intuition that no intervention of his would have its intended effect, would be more likely, in fact, to swing the scales of chance definitely against him. He kept the children up late, for company, and did, indeed, at last find the games he played with them something that for a time kept his mind occupied. But the children, grown heavy-eyed, had to be put to bed eventually, and, as he had his supper, he felt extraordinarily lonely. It was with a feeling of guilty relief that, some time afterwards, he heard Charley, the elder boy, call out that he was awake, and that he wrapped him in a blanket and set him on his knee on a chair in the garden. There the two sat. invisible except for the faint intermittent glow of Fred's pipe. Soon the boy fell asleep snugly in the arm that encircled him. And Fred, as he sat there. wondered why it was that he should be so fond of the child, the legacy of a passion he had not shared, should feel so drawn towards him. They were, indeed, both of them perhaps no more than trivial incidents in Sally's life, helpless in her hands, dependent upon the caprice of her impulsive heart, powerless to influence the Destiny for the shaping of which they were waiting.

VII

Unconscious of the practical shape that Liddy's interest in their movements was taking, Sally and Tom walked down through the shimmering heat of the late afternoon to the tram terminus, where they boarded a car that carried them into Pricehurst. An instinctive discretion made Sally mask her emotions, but the fact was that, without qualification, the expedition was an exciting adventure for her. After the restless discontent to which she was always more or less a prey. this entire evening dedicated unreservedly to her pleasure was so delightful that her heart positively thumped within her, like that of a child who sets out for a long-anticipated treat. During the ride on the tram, she felt girlish and simple-minded, put aside the morbid excitement of her half-furtive relationship with her companion, and surrendered herself to the simple exhilaration of the warm air that streamed through her hair, and the swift, undulating progress of the tram. Tom, erect and hot by her side, was absorbed in his thoughts, and found nothing stimulating in the ride, rather he was annoyed by the erratic behavior of the tram which made it so difficult for him to preserve an appearance of martial dignity.

It was not until they reached the restaurant at which they were to have supper that Tom began to assert himself. It was a little Italian place, mournful with the decayed magnificence of dingy gilding and flyblown mirrors, in which perspired its proprietor, a short, greasy man with a fierce moustache, and two sallow bandits, all of whom were dressed in greasy dress-clothes with dusky, frayed white shirts. There were only a few people present at that early hour, and Tom was able to secure a table in a recess at one end whence they could survey the room at ease. As if defensively, Tom assumed an air of marked aggressiveness, ordered the meal in a hectoring voice, and interspersed his words with snatches of Hindustani, to confound the waiter, whose voice, rich with foreign nuances, sounded a trifle patronizing.

- "Now, what shall we have to drink?" Tom asked Sally, as he stared rather uneasily at the thumbed card that served as wine-list.
 - "Water, please, or ginger-beer," she answered.
- "Oh, no, that won't do at all. What do you say to a bottle of claret? and I could have a tot of something to follow."
- "'Tis all the same to me," Sally answered, leaning back luxuriously.
- "Waiter!" Tom called, following the word with a snake-like hiss. "Bottle of claret!"
- "Very good, sir. What number, sir?" inquired the waiter, as if the cellars held untold variety of vintages.
- "Never you mind about the number. You get a bottle of claret, and put some jaldi into it."

[&]quot;Sir?"

SHEPHERD'S WARNING

"Be quick, I said. Hurry; hut jao."

280

As the saturnine waiter skated hurriedly along the room to intone rich gutturals down the speaking-tube, Tom winked knowingly.

"Lazy set of blinkers," he observed.

Tom was anxious to show that he was a man of the world, a character that Fidding gave him no opportunity to display.

As the meal progressed Sally became more obviously emotional. Her eyes flashed round the dingy room, which was still lighted by lingering daylight and heavy with the fumes of forgotten meals, and she laughed rather excitedly on the least provocation. But she still spoke little, as if afraid that her words, once released, might elude her control and reveal the nervous intensity of her feelings. Tom could see that she was excited, and, although posing to himself as a patronizing critic of her exuberance, was himself moved. At the end of the meal, he ordered a liqueur of spirits, and bought a large, evil-smelling cigar with luxurious recklessness.

From the restaurant, they passed to the Pricehurst Palace, where Tom booked two half-crown stalls. They arrived to find the orchestra playing a noisy overture as accompaniment to a display of advertisements crudely painted on a drop-scene. From the moment of their entrance, Sally set herself to absorb every detail. It was delightful in every way. Even the loud excitement of the gallery, the overpowering

heat that seemed to be intensified by the whir of seemingly useless electric fans, the overpowering smell of tobacco, and the elusive but insistent scent peculiar to all theatres, were stimulating. She watched the turns with absorbed interest, while Tom, who was really the weaker character of the two, kept glancing at her to see how she received successive jokes or thrills. Between the turns, she talked vivaciously of the performance, but Tom, in spite of her obvious enjoyment, was dissatisfied. From time to time he glared at the people near him, resenting the way in which by their mere presence they put a restraint upon him. wanted to sit with his arm round Sally, lose himself in a hectic flirtation, however purposeless and futile it might be, and from the long intimate glances that seemed to give a warmer interpretation to Sally's light chatter, he felt that under other circumstances his will might have been attainable. Why, he wondered, had he been such a fool as to take seats in the stalls, where, even in that theatre, the standard of propriety was irksome?

When the performance was over, and they were moving slowly towards the exit, closely elbowed by the crowd, Tom felt it necessary to adopt a blasé attitude.

- "Not much of a show," he observed.
- "Oh, I enjoyed it," Sally protested.
- "That is all right, then. But I have seen a lot better. . . . I have seen some funny things in the

way of shows, in one place and another," Tom said, raising his voice. "They wouldn't do for everybody, though. . . ."

Sally nodded an interested encouragement, and caught murmurs of Aden, Calcutta, and the Oxford, but she was not really paying the least attention to what Tom said. She had told him that she had enjoyed the performance, and it was true, but what she had enjoyed had been not the individual turns-Tom's sole criterion—but the mise en scène. Some dramatic strain in her had responded eagerly to every moment of sentiment or drama, making her almost weep when the rest of the audience were watching the various performers with tolerant criticism. Once or twice, the most trivial incidents had filled with tears her eves that remained dry both in anger and distress. She scarcely knew herself, and felt nervous about her own behavior, as if it was that of an eccentric companion, for whom she was reluctantly responsible. She left the building as if in a dream. Even the cool evening air fanning her forehead, and the prosaic scenes in the crowded street outside the music hall, did not at first awaken her. For a moment, she stood, feeling slightly dazed, while the crowd jostled past her. Then she realized for the first time that Tom had taken advantage of her detachment to obtain a comprehensive hold on her arm. She looked up at him standing with his face in sharp relief in the light of the arc-lamps over the portico of the theatre, and a feeling of untutored yearning surprised her heart. Then discretion overtook her errant emotions, and she deftly withdrew her arm, but at the same time reduced the significance of her action by a smile.

"It is good to be out of all that frowst," Tom said, moving about comfortably inside his uniform. "What do you say to walking home instead of going by tram? We could go by the old path."

"I don't know," Sally fenced.

She felt an urgent temptation to prolong this holiday from normal life, but at the same time realized quite clearly that, in her present state of mind, she could not trust her discretion during a walk over hills and through woods spellbound by the magic of a June night. A few years before, she would have unhesitatingly vielded to the biddings of her emotions: now she struggled against them. But her old recklessness, if dormant, had not deserted her, and suddenly it awoke. Her life at Fidding seemed to unroll before her, stale and forbidding. A thought of Fred flashed through her mind, and in that moment she saw nothing but his more irritating qualities. Why should she not enjoy herself, just for once, just for a few hours, when that enjoyment would be so mild and harmless? She realized that Tom was urging her to agree to his suggestion, and, with a defiant opening of her eyes, as if she was flaunting visible critics, vielded.

"All right. I don't mind, though 'tis a proper sort of clamber," she said.

VIII

On the hill-crest, with the light-spangled shadow of the town behind, and the yearning night all around, in an air warm and almost palpable, Sally paused with a sobbing gasp.

"Leave me be, Tom, oh, do leave me be!" she pleaded desperately, and tore his arm from her waist.

During that indolent ascent, after the last houses had been left behind, she had been willing enough to play at trysting, had yielded herself to his importunities with an ardor that was nevertheless gratefully aware that her emotions were under control, that retraction would be possible when it became necessary. But when the summit was reached, her assurance suddenly Pleasant make-belief had imperceptibly changed until it bore the semblance of intense reality. She lost all courage, felt as if the next few steps, which would shut the lights of the town from view as the descent beyond the crest was begun, would in some way sever her from a tangible support. It was as if, powerless to resist, she was being impelled forward into the rich night, the magic of which would cast a spell on her senses, confusing impulse with will, and reality with shadows.

"Why, what is the matter, all of a sudden?" Tom asked, bewildered.

"I don't know: only I don't want you to touch me."

"All right. You always was a funny kid."

Tom conceded her request readily, feeling confident that it would not be persisted in for long.

They descended the hill in silence, dipping into a ground-mist that blunted the shadowy masses of trees, and made the corn-fields bordering the path, as it crossed the valley, look insubstantial and obscure. A stile that barred the path seemed to lurch towards them as the mist shifted, and vanished again in a whorl of vapor. It was as if the world was asleep, and they had unwittingly trespassed upon its dreams, were treading, fully animate, the dim tracts of unconsciousness. And, apart from their own quiet footfalls, the only sound that could be heard was the reeling of a night-jar somewhere in the woods that crowned the hills across the valley.

It was when Sally was just about to climb over the stile that Tom broke the silence, and, defying her petition, stretched out his hand to take her arm. Rather to his surprise, it was impassive, and yielded to his touch. Almost before he knew it, Sally had turned, was in his arms, looking at him strangely, her lips just parted, her breast rising and falling with deep slow breaths. She was not excited, hardly moved, but seemed waiting for some word or action to unlock her senses, touch her into vivid life. Her very passiveness, so unexpected, moved Tom more urgently than would the most impassioned response.

286 SHEPHERD'S WARNING

"Sally, you are wasted here," he declared feverishly. "Why don't you leave it all and come with me? I could give you a life worth living—a sight better than you have in this dead-and-alive hole."

Sally seemed to be languidly watching something over his shoulder, regardless of his words.

"Sally, don't you hear what I say?" he asked, shaking her with overbearing mastery.

"You mustn't say such things."

The words were uttered by Sally's mouth; but they were purely automatic, for her mind was flirting with bright and alluring imaginations far away.

"Do you mean that?" Tom asked harshly, with a melodramatic feeling that he was about to commit some act of astounding self-abnegation.

"No, I don't."

Sally flashed the response, and became, all at once, alive and pulsing.

"Well, what did you say it for?"

"'Tis no use," Sally answered, with a curious tone of hope in her voice. "How could I leave Fred and the children?"

"Then you would, if it weren't for them?"

"I would do anything. I am sick and tired of it all."

"I don't count, it seems!"

"Yes, you do," Sally answered in a muffled voice, and let him spend his kisses on her lips.

"I suppose I am bad through and through," she

said, when he freed her. "But I can't help it, try as I will. 'Tis in me; I was made so."

She pressed her hand on her breast, as if beneath it was some physical cause of her behavior.

- "You aren't bad," Tom assured her emphatically. "You don't know what badness is. It's no fault of yours. Why, you are no better than a babby, if it come to that."
- "'Tis little you know about me," Sally answered in a low voice.
- "I don't want to know about you, I want you, Sally. Say you will come. You would see some life then—you have never seen a garrison town. And who would be there to say as we wasn't married proper? It ain't as if we was going to be on the strength. It will be a fat time before there is any chance of that——"
 - "What is 'on the strength,' Tom?"
 - "Well, same as if ----"
- "It don't matter," Sally interrupted. "I don't care. Go on with what you was saying."
- "My time will be up before long. Then we will settle down somewhere, and I will get a decent billet—keep a little pub one day, p'r'aps. . . . It is not as if Fred suited you. He don't. You might have known he wouldn't. Fred is soft. If he had bin different, I wouldn't have said nothing."

Tom really believed it. He would have believed anything at that moment, have essayed anything.

"But what about the children?"

Of course, Sally merely asked this question to see what Tom would say. She told herself fiercely that it was impossible . . . impossible. She did not even know herself what she really wanted.

"You could get them after," Tom explained. "Fred would be glad enough to be rid of them, I lay."

"I don't know so much about that. He is fond of them, particularly of Charley."

"Oh, he would let them go fast enough, when it came to the point," Tom assured her, devoutly hoping that Fred would do nothing of the sort.

"Fred is queer," Sally observed, her mind lingering on his affection for the elder child. "Still, he has bin good to me, has old Fred."

"You don't realize what it would mean to get away from here. You have seen nothing," Tom declared, and abandoned, as beyond his ability, an impulse to describe the life he had seen, the peoples and lands that drew their colors from a brighter palette than did Fidding, the cities where there was gaiety and movement. He tried instead to depict the life in a garrison town, finding the attractions, that seemed so real and insistent, elusive and indefinable. He murmured of bands, music halls, and shops, while Sally burned in a slow fire of indecision, the feeling that she must try to express herself, justify her attitude, gradually dominating her.

"Oh, Tom," she exclaimed, "I have always bin discontented, but 'tis because of my bad luck. I never

had a chance. Everyone has bin against me. You don't know what I have had to put up with. If things had bin different, I might have bin different, too. You don't know . . . "

Her voice trailed away, as she realized the hopelessness of attempting such an exposition of her life. She knew it all, it was ripe for utterance, yet, when she tried to shape them in words, her thoughts became obscure and baffling.

Tom listened to her voice, but took no interest in the penumbra through which she was groping her way. For him Sally was merely a physical fact; so long as he could possess her, he cared about nothing else.

"You have had bad luck, right enough," he agreed.

"But that will all change if you come with me. I can't say things like some can, but I want you bad, Sally."

She thrilled in his arms.

"How big you are!" she murmured irrelevantly.

They seemed alone in the world. The mist, imperceptibly thickening, fold on white fold, deadened their voices, seemed to make intimacy more intimate. No breath of air nodded the ripening heads of the corn. The night-jar even had fallen silent.

IX

Sitting alone in the little kitchen, Fred heard the sound of distant footfalls through the open window.

290 SHEPHERD'S WARNING

His long vigil was over. Rising from his chair, he went to the window, and leaning from it, the cool scent of flowers drifting about him, heard the low murmur of a parting, followed by the hurried beat of light feet approaching. His resolution faltered at the sound. He realized that he did not really know why he had waited so patiently for Sally to return, nor what he would say to her when she came. There had been in his mind a scarcely formulated intention to try and influence her by his presence, or perhaps it was merely that he wanted to try and read in her face what had happened that evening, to avoid lying in bed with the knowledge that her face and its secrets were in the house, and might be there for some time before they were revealed to him.

But those footfalls unnerved him. He was unreasoningly afraid of being found there still dressed, of possibly awakening sharp suspicion in Sally's mind by his presence. He turned with a sudden movement, and hastily went up-stairs, beginning to unbutton his clothes as he did so. It had become suddenly important that Sally should find him in bed, and think that he had retired there at his normal time. She would never have understood his motive in awaiting her, for she had no idea, could have at the most only a suspicion, of the thoughts that he shared with Liddy.

He had not been out of the room for a minute before Sally quietly opened the door and entered, her breast tumultuous after her hasty walk up the village. Her first glance was at the clock. Half-past one! At once some undercurrent in her mind began planning a specious time-table to cover the two hours that had passed since she left the theatre, rather to account for the hour which was the excess over the time it took to walk back across the hills. Then her eve fell on the table. Upon it stood a little supper that Fred had prepared for her-bread, margarine, cheese, and a plate containing a cucumber, tomatoes, radishes, and lettuce. She smiled rather wistfully. "What a funny old Fred he is," she thought, and then, "What is in this jug?" She took off a plate that covered it, and looked in. Lemonade! Fred's thoughtful, and so unexpected, preparation for her return made her laugh a little hysterically. She was touched more deeply than she knew, and stood for a moment looking round the little room that had seemed so like a prison to her. friendly and familiar look gave her a pang. Even the untidy basket in which she kept her work materials. crowned at that moment with a bunch of Fred's socks. looked to her almost reproachful. After all, was she really going to desert all these little things that, unobtrusively and imperceptibly, had, after all, assumed a hold upon her?

Throwing her hat carelessly on Fred's chair, she sat down at the table. She was not hungry, but must not neglect Fred's pathetic little solicitude. The lemonade was welcome, however, and although not quite cold, refreshing. She drank long draughts of it, while her

SHEPHERD'S WARNING

mind ran back courageously to survey the preceding two hours. She had yielded her lips, but no more. Yet had she not yielded her entire self by implication? Had she not promised Tom that she would run away with him? She was even at that moment merely a hostage to convenience, would already have been far away had it been possible. And she was going to meet Fred as usual, feign vapid pleasure at her outing, share his bed. . . . Even as she realized the difficulties to which she was committed, her spirit began to reassert itself. She forgot the dumb reproach of her surroundings, thought with fierce hatred of what she considered her bad luck, the hostility that seemed to beset her at every turn; thought, too, with rising throat, of Tom.

When she went up-stairs, Fred opened apparently sleepy eyes and blinked at the candle in her hand.

"Did I wake you up?" she asked.

"No; at least, I don't think so," he answered, and lay quietly watching her.

He caught only the merest glimpses of her face, and they told him nothing. He had expected at least the flush of excitement, but she was pale and seemed unemotional. As she twisted up her hair in front of the little hanging mirror, he saw her small, well-shaped arms, the curve of her slender neck, and felt an aching loneliness. But when Sally was in her nightdress, with her hair caught back and falling between her

292

shoulders in a long, soft mass, instead of blowing out the candle, she suddenly jumped upon the bed, and crouched there like a child, smiling at him.

"'Twas good of you to think of setting a bit of supper for me, Fred," she said. "The lemonade was lovely. I have left some for the kiddies in the morning. Have they been good? They was asleep as I came up."

"They have bin good enough. Lid came in to see they was all right after tea."

"She did?"

Sally's face was troubled by a shadow of suspicion, but in a moment it became unruffled again.

"Did you enjoy yourself?"

"Oh, yes! 'twas lovely."

Fred said nothing about the lateness of her return, but she almost wished he would. At that moment she almost wished he knew all that had happened.

"Are you fond of me?" she asked.

"You know I am, well enough."

Fred was perplexed, and felt that perhaps he had been faithless to this irresponsible wife of his by suspecting her. It was always the same. He had once told himself that Sally's nature was like a rainbow, it was compounded of such evanescent chromatics of radiance that it was impossible to define its characteristics.

"How fond are you of me?"

Fred hesitated, his mind rejecting immensities.

294 SHEPHERD'S WARNING

- "If you don't know, I can't tell you," he ended by saying.
- "You are a dear, funny old Fred, after all," Sally declared.

The half-wheedling words, spoken with affectionate raillery, ratified a resolution.

"I must wash my face," Sally added, with apparent inconsequence. "'Twas so hot this evening."

There was nothing unusual in her announcement. Her passion for cleanliness, although tempered, remained, was, indeed, exercised on her children, to their mortification and dismay. Slipping into Fred's jacket, she pattered down-stairs, a grotesque spectacle, and in the scullery rinsed hands and face in absolving water, with intense seriousness.

X

When he parted from Sally outside his grandfather's cottage, Tom entered the kitchen almost stealthily, with a feeling of sulky hostility to the old man, who already once or twice had shown unexpected and disconcerting sharpness of inference. There was no supper waiting, no light even, and Tom struck a match to light the candle that stood ready for him on the table. As he did so, his eye was caught by a white envelope lying there. Directly the candle was alight,

he picked up the letter, and tore open the envelope with a wry imprecation. The letter ran:

My dearest Tom,

What is keeping you so long? I want you cruel, and I can't see what is keeping you has you was only going to see your folk for a few days I can't think what is keeping you. As anything happened? haven't you no heart and you know I can't bear being without you. "Is it some girl?" I always said as you was "not to be trusted." You haven't even wrote and if you don't soon or come I shall chance everything and see for myself.

It ended with an initial above a luxuriant parterre of irregular crosses, and was written by the wife of a sergeant in Tom's battery, with whom he had become entangled, believing her to be the object of his irrevocable devotion until his eyes had fallen again upon Sally after so many years.

Tom's first method of procedure was simple. He filled and lit his pipe, accompanying the action by subdued, sibilant swearing. But objectless imprecations did not unravel the knot in which he had become entangled, and he abandoned them for more reasonable cursing at his own folly. Thence he passed on to accusations against Sally, to whose horrible attractiveness his whole dilemma, he felt, was due. Could he bring himself to give up Sally? If he took her back

with him, could he pacify his correspondent? It seemed as if he could do neither the one nor the other. As the smoke, fiercely puffed from his pipe, became dense in the room, his courage faltered. He knew that he could not face the woman who had written to him, and, to support his realization of that unpleasant fact, came specious excuses for his resultant conduct towards Sally. He would be doing her a kindness to leave her with Fred, after all. That scheme to which he had persuaded her to agree would never do in reality. Sally was a hot-head. Perhaps he had not been altogether his practical self during his stay in Fidding. Yet what else could he have done but act as he had? Had not Sally practically thrown herself at his head? All the same, he did not attempt to gloss the fact that he wanted her badly, but began to persuade himself at first tentatively, then with assurance—that he was acting in an extraordinarily generous way, was protecting both Sally and Fred from themselves. "After all, she is a bit of a spitfire," he told himself, as he went to bed, forgetful of the benevolent rôle he had been so recently rehearsing.

In the morning, his grandfather referred to the letter.

[&]quot;You see it all right?" he asked.

[&]quot;Yes; I have bin recalled," Tom explained, wordperfect in the part he had devised by an inspiration that would at any rate safely extricate him from Fidding.

- "Bin recalled? I thought you said there was no hurry about getting back."
 - "It seems they can't do without me!"
- "Ah, I can believe it!" was the old man's sour retort.

Tom meant to lose no time. As soon as breakfast was over, he packed his things, and then set out to say good-bye to Liddy. Her reception of his story was not so satisfactory as that of his grandfather.

"Ah, I see the letter, when I looked in last evening," she told him. "I thought 'twas in a woman's hand."

Tom grew shiny with embarrassment, but blustered it out fairly creditably.

- "You might well think so," he agreed, "but it was from my sergeant. He writes proper like a girl. We often chips him about it."
- "Fancy! I never thought sergeants called you back and that," Liddy answered innocently.
 - "Well, you know now," Tom retorted.
- "Well, if you are going, that is the end of it. I hardly think 'tis likely you will see dad again, not if you go out to India."
- "They won't send me out there! Why, it won't be long before I get my discharge, and it ain't likely I'm going for an extension. Not me!"
- "Don't you think he is getting to sim terrible old?" Liddy asked. "Of course he is pushing eighty now; still, he looks more, to my mind."
 - "He is changed, of course."

"'Tis only him as kips us here, as I told you, and I shall be glad enough to get away, and so will George. Though 'twill be a sad trial when he do leave us."

Tom was not particularly interested in anyone's affairs except his own, but he could not help realizing how torn Liddy was between her affection for the old man and her desire to get away into some country place where she, her husband, and her babies all would be happier.

- "'Tis only natural you should put yourself first," he said.
- "I don't know, I'm sure. Sims so heartless like to be sat here waiting for such a thing. If only he would come away himself ——"
- "Not him. There ain't no chance of that. Well, I must be running. Good-bye, Lid; say good-bye to George."
- "Have you said good-bye to Fred and Sally yet?" Liddy asked, as he backed towards the gate.
 - "Not yet. I must run over later."

Liddy watched his retreating figure with puzzled speculation. "What is his game, I wonder?" she asked herself.

Tom's immediate game, as a matter of fact, was to retire to his grandfather's cottage, there to wait until Fred was safely at home for his dinner. He had realized only at the last moment how much easier his parting with Sally would be, if it took place, stealthily, in the presence of Fred. He cursed himself for not

having thought of it before, but there was nothing to do but wait, and explain his delay to his grandfather by referring to the times of trains.

"Nasty things," the old man stigmatized them.
"I have never bin by them but once. Shakes your innards to jelly, they do."

Bob was rather seedy that day, and moved about stiffly, with a pinched look on his face that brought home to Tom his sister's fears. He felt that perhaps this might be indeed the last time he would see the old man, whose familiar figure accompanied memory to its source, who had, indeed, become almost of legendary permanence. It seemed incredible that one day, and a day perhaps not far distant, he would cease to exist. And this rather unusual sentiment in Tom softened him as he said good-bye.

"I shall go straight on to the station after I have said good-bye to Fred," he said. "Mind you take care of yourself. You are too valuable to let yourself go and get ill."

"That's it," said his grandfather. "But 'tis easy talking. I'm pretty near done with, and I knows it."

"It is only your feeling a bit queer that makes you talk so."

"Ah! "Tis queer with years I am. Well, goodbye, Tom. "Twon't do you no harm to get away from Fidding, to my mind."

Not prepared to investigate the meaning of that remark, Tom set off for his brother's cottage.

300 SHEPHERD'S WARNING

He found the whole family at their dinner, and, with an important air of haste, told Fred that he must return to barracks at once. Fred, full of self-reproach after his experience the preceding evening, was quite upset to feel that he should part from his brother at a moment when his suspicions had scarcely ceased to trouble their relationship.

"Well, that is vexing!" he declared. "I thought as we was going to have you here a rare long time."

"Can't be helped. 'Tain't no doing of mine," Tom answered, carefully avoiding Sally's eyes. "I will drop you a line later to say how I get on," he added, meaning Sally to guess that his words were meant for her.

She came with him to the gate, however, and her troubled look was taken by Tom as an indication of her disappointment at this apparent check to their plans.

"I will write to you before long," Tom told her hurriedly. "Just wait till you hear from me. It will all be all right. A few days don't signify."

Sally was distressingly attractive, and he felt for a moment that he had been mad to yield to his fears.

"Fancy having to leave you without so much as a kiss." he murmured.

Sally, about to speak, checked herself, and looked at him with her disturbing eyes. Her glance made him falter. She seemed to read his guilty thoughts, and, without warning, he turned hot and red.

"I must be going," he said hastily, glancing at the door behind Sally, as if in warning.

"So I see," she answered, and looked at him with quickened but contemptuous interest.

At the corner he turned. Sally was still at the gate, her figure gracefully poised even in repose. But she was not looking at him.

XI

With the children safely in bed, Sally sat waiting for Fred to come home that evening. It was very peaceful in the kitchen, where there were no sounds except the ticking of the clock, and now and again the strident buzzing of the flies that were weaving erratic figures under the ceiling. The heat of the day was over, and door and windows were open, allowing the freshening air of evening to stream through the little room. Sally was quite passive. The turmoil of action and indecision was over; it was as if she had reached the end of a chapter in her life. She had no longer any intention of following Tom, even if he asked her to do so, but during her short interview with him in the garden she had guessed that he regretted his earlier ardors. That he had been recalled she did not believe, was inclined to doubt whether he had received a letter at all. and his statement, that at first took her by surprise, seemed no more than a clumsy excuse for escape, when she was able to study him and question him unhampered by the presence of others. More than anything, she was amused by the embarrassed cowardice he had shown, and by his laborious evasion of an undertaking that she had already decided to cancel. She was relieved, indeed, at being so easily extricated from the adventure. As she sat there, with hands folded in her lap—a reposeful attitude rare in her—she realized with increasing clearness that she had been carried away by traditional grievances, and by a traditional susceptibility, neither of which remained very real. had undoubtedly played with Tom, had ventured, as it were, into treacherous waters, as probably she would always venture. But the semblance of reality that had so startlingly confronted her was merely a distortion due to the stimulus of excitement to which she was not inured. The passionate kisses of the previous night did not seem shameful, for she had been nurtured on such kisses, but they did seem profitless, and purposeless as the kisses in a dream. In the candor of reaction Tom himself seemed to mean nothing, represented nothing, was merely the embodiment of an old and outworn sentiment. Was not even the hostility of fortune possibly a too-readily accepted abstraction? Who, indeed, was likely to remain at enmity with her a few years hence? The last members of the old community would soon be gone, and their successors regarded her with only superficial prejudice. Peace was in sight. was well above the horizon, and, astonishingly, that

peace was not only external but also internal. Although she did not realize it, her own passionate perversity was fading. If she would never become so submissive as the women of the old Fidding, she was already ceasing to be exotic. Her environment and her own nature were approximating.

Fred, when at length he came home, found Sally unusually gentle and self-reproachful, but not easily responsive to his own optimism and happiness, which was due to the fact that not only did Sally remain his, but also in some strange way seemed to have been brought nearer to him in spite of Tom's visit.

- "Do you know, we have bin married seven years," Sally observed, while they were having supper. "'Tis a long time, and, though I never noticed it till now, I am getting old."
- "You look it," Fred retorted with affectionate sarcasm.
 - "But seven years is a lot."
- "'Tis a tidy time, but you wait till 'tis twenty-seven."

Sally turned over the thought in her mind, and found it surprisingly lacking in unpleasantness.

- "You have bin patient and good, Fred," she said.

 "And maybe I have not simmed to notice it like I might have."
- "'Tis you that has bin good, putting up with a chap like me," Fred assured her.

Sally abandoned these mutual approbations, and

became lost again in the interest of her own personality.

- "I shall never be what you would like me to be," she murmured. "Tis as if there was a fire in me that won't be put out, sometimes."
- "How do you know what I would like you to be?" Fred asked, smiling, but his question was not answered.
- "I do wish Liddy and your dad would come round, instead of being so set against me."

Sally the defiant had become surprisingly humble.

- "Oh, Lid has got a bee in her bonnet. But there is no call to worry over she. 'Tis all bark and no bite with her. And she will be leaving Fidding one of these days."
- "She could leave straight off if 'twasn't that your dad will have nothing to do with me. I could look after him well enough if only he would give me the chance."
- "He will come round fast enough, if you give him time," Fred asserted with simulated confidence.
- "I am not so sure about that. He is not so bitter as he was, maybe, but he is a long way from coming round."
- "Old folks' notions take a lot of changing. But look how fond he is of our Charley!"
- "Ah, 'tis queer he should be," Sally agreed, thinking at the same time that Fred's similar liking for the boy was equally strange.
 - "Well, there is nothing for it but to humor the old

gentleman," Fred said. "I am afraid he en't got much longer. There is some as won't be sorry, I reckon, and them Revnoldses is one. You know how they was after his little place? 'Tis only hes for his life, you know, it won't ever come to us. So soon as dad dies. they will git it to pull it down, and make themselves a drive. 'Tis unhandy for them having to go round by the church and along the lane. That is what makes them so eager after it. They don't care about nothing else so long as they get it. They don't let hes feelings worry them. And he knows well enough as they are waiting, and wondering how much longer he is going to last. 'Provoking old man' they call him. 'Twas only last Tuesday or Wednesday I heard two of them passing, when I was working at Miss Phillips' hedge, Mrs. Reynolds and that sister of hers. 'I really don't know when that provoking old man do mean to die,' Mrs. Reynolds says. 'I didn't oughter say so, but he is only a nuisance to himself and everybody else.' she She didn't know I was there, almost beside says. her!"

While Fred was speaking, Sally felt a rush of sympathy for the old man who had been so much at enmity with her. After all, was he not now as much out of place as herself had been? He must feel as lonely as ever she had felt, and his loneliness must be the more bitter because he was helpless, and because his pride and self-reliance had been brought so low. Perhaps she was not so exceptional, after all; perhaps her fate

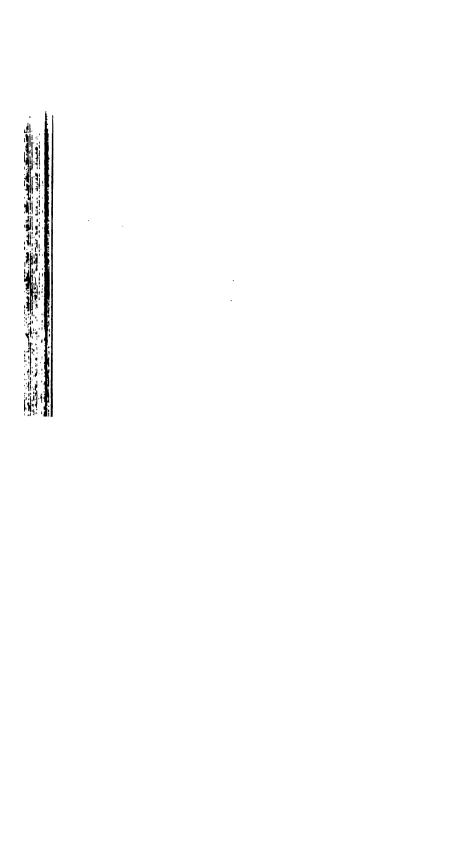
was shared, more or less, by everyone, and it had been so irksome merely because she would not lightly yield to it. Could she act differently in the future, drift with fortune, not struggle against the stream when struggle was foredoomed to failure? Even as she asked herself the question, she saw that already she had become more submissive, that the wild tides of youth were receding, and leaving her high-and-dry on the firm shore of a land that was more tranquil than the tumultuous seas through which she had passed.

XII

When Fred went out into the garden after supper, the last light was fading in the west, and the air was heavy with the scent of flowers, an indescribable, confused fragrance in which the insistent sweetness of the night-flowering stock dominated. At that hour the village street still seemed rustic, the crude fronts of the newer cottages, that were interspersed among the homely survivors of the past, were toned down, and softened into insignificance. But, above the hills in front, the glow of the town was bright and glaring, like a sinister sunrise. It spread to the east in a circle, reflecting the trail of the main road. Down towards the station, a mile and a half away, the even glow was paled from time to time by bright flashes from the electric trams, the sound of which could be heard, a

subdued rumble, in the stillness of the evening. There were few people about, and the place was quiet, seemed fallen into the easy sleep of old age, until out towards Fidding Minnis, a spot as yet unreached by the tentacles of the town, a dog barked faintly. The challenge was answered by an excited hubbub from far and near, that reached a strident climax, and lessened gradually, until one obstinate creature alone continued to bark an occasional inquiry.

Fred stood for a moment, sensitive to the beauty of the night and the fragrance of the scent-laden air. Then he struck a match, the flame throwing his face into warm relief, lit and pulled contentedly at his pipe, and glanced down the darkening street. Along it. here and there, lights shone out from cottage windows. soft lights that seemed more friendly than the harsh illumination of the large houses on the hill, from one of which there floated the strains of a gramophone. While his eyes lingered on the scene, the door of his grandfather's cottage opened, and he saw the old man silhouetted against the light in the kitchen, a tall, bent figure in a round hat, leaning on a stick. moment later, his soft old voice could be heard calling the cat: "Jinny! Jinny! Where ha' you got to?" Then, when the truant emerged, self-contained and unhurriedly, from the darkness, a note of endearment crept into the tones-"Why, there you be! Come along, old gal!"

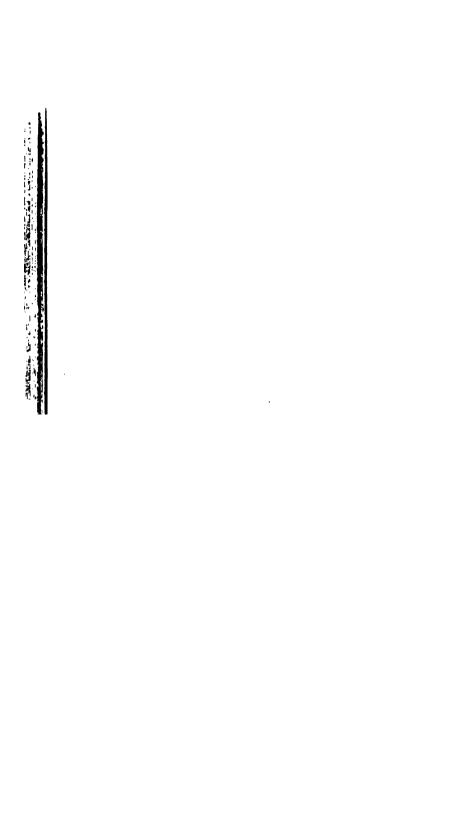






















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